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DECOLONIZATION AS SUCH": READING INTERVENTIONS IN MAHASWETA DEVI AND ALEXIS WRIGHT

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"DECOLONIZATION AS SUCH": READING INTERVENTIONS IN MAHASWETA DEVI AND ALEXIS WRIGHT

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Abstract

My thesis is an exercise in reading literatures that engage with Aboriginality in the contexts of India and Australia. It examines Mahasweta Devi's stories on Aboriginal India, anthologized as *Imaginary Maps* (1995), along with her short story "Shishu" (1993), and Australian writer of the Waanyi nation Alexis Wright's novel *Carpentaria* (2006). I analyze these texts as, what I suggest to be, interventionist writings that tell us about varied effects of colonial histories, decolonization, globalization, and retain a complex relation with the notion of literary resistance. I argue these narratives of literary histories of Aboriginal peoples of India and Australia provide a trenchant critique of oppressive structures and also, simultaneously, enable us to reinterpret a decolonized future. The theoretical focus of this project draws upon scholarship on postcolonial theory and theories of decolonization.

Key Words: Decolonization, Indigeneity, Postcolonial studies, Literary histories, *Imaginary Maps*, *Carpentaria*, Mahasweta Devi, Alexis Wright, Aboriginal India, Indigenous literatures of Australia, Literary resistance, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak.

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List of Abbreviations

Mahasweta Devi, *Pterodactyl, Puran Sahay, and Pirtha*..... *PT*

Trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Imaginary Maps*.....*IM*

Introduction

> Decolonization never takes place unnoticed, for it influences individuals and modifies them fundamentally. [...] Decolonization is the veritable creation of new men. But this creation owes nothing of its legitimacy to any supernatural power; the 'thing' which has been colonized becomes a man during the same process by which it frees itself.
>
> Frantz Fanon. *The Wretched of the Earth* (36-37)

> Not all postcolonial cultures are postcolonial in the same way. The postcolonialism of metropolitan East-Indian intellectual is indeed not the same as that of a rural Ugandan, nor is that the postcolonialism of Aboriginal Australian same as that of the white Canadian, nor (even) is the postcolonialism of the Native Canadian the same as that of the Native American, the New Zealand Maori, or the Australian Aborigine. [...] Colonial power is a product of all the vectors in a system, and we prevent its interrogation if we exclude any of them from our analysis (Johnston and Lawson 2000: 368-69).

There is, as Ashis Nandy suggests, a "differentia of colonialism" (Nandy 1) that must not be ignored. As Nandy explains, not only did colonialism function differently in different terrains but the "sentiment" itself was not simple. It was not always present in terms of need for economic benefits and could also thrive solely "on economic and political losses" (Nandy 1). Thus to understand decolonization, as a program in reversing the effects of colonialism and its significant failures, we need to explore the complexities of colonialism to some extent, and think through the consequences of colonialism, before critiquing decolonization within decolonizing nation-states. This is so because, as Gayatri Spivak elaborates, "decolonization" is one that presents the remnants of ideas that circulated in the old colony (Spivak 1993: 78). Consequently, it is not surprising to note that decolonization itself ushers in an element of colonialism in regards to the conditions

of historically oppressed communities. We know the way colonialism functioned in the settler-colonial context of Australia is not the way it worked it in the subcontinent. And at the same time, as we shall see, an analysis of decolonization within these countries problematizes our definitions of the settler and formerly colonized subject as "post-colonial" subjects (Shohat 1996: 327) in relation to the Aboriginal peoples in Australia and India.

Speaking of the failure of decolonization in Aboriginal India, Spivak suggests that decolonization "in this context is a convenient and misleading word because no other can be found" (Spivak 1993: 78). Although it can never be "generalized" (Spivak 2005: 475), the figure of the subaltern, then, makes us rethink the postcolonial moment because of its continued victimization due to processes of decolonization. But why is it that another word for decolonization cannot be found? And why does she choose to use a "convenient and misleading word"? Here, it should be noted that Spivak's use of this caveat for decolonization, while using it in reference to the space depicted in Mahasweta's fiction, is telling of her concern in precisely defining the one who "decolonizes": Ella Shohat's "post-colonial" subject (327). This subject is, thus, already implicated in this decolonization by her use of this "convenient" and "misleading" word because the word when used in relation to the space that Mahasweta's fiction talks about – Aboriginal India at the margins of the "culture of imperialism" (Spivak 1993: 78) – reveals the dual position inhabited by the formerly colonized subject. It is a position that challenges his/her own "postcoloniality" (Spivak 1993: 280-81). Thus, it is possible to suggest that "decolonization," and the diverse ways in which it affects the lives of Aboriginal communities within nation-states, require us to qualify the definitions of the

colonized subject and the "settler-invader" as "postcolonial subjects" (Johnston 2000: 362).

Jenny Sharpe, in her essay "Figures of Colonial Resistance" (1989), suggests, "For the colonial subject who can answer the colonizers back is the product of the same vast ideological machinery that silences the subaltern" (Sharpe 143). Sharpe's definition of the colonial subject does allow us to think about the "vast ideological machinery" more and its rather curious relationship with the colonized subject; at the same time, the definition also seems to suggest a state of paralysis by locating the colonial subject as a "product". We know from Fanon's rather provocative conception of decolonization, as he envisioned it at particular moment in the history of a national liberation struggle, that the "'thing' which has been colonized becomes a 'man' during the same process by which it frees itself". If there is a "process" during which this "thing," or a "product," as it were, could "free itself," then the process during which this transformation could take place is a dynamic one that needs to be closely examined. As Alan Lawson suggests, "[b]ecause the postcolonial situation is always already mediated, it is forever in the process of being re-mediated" (Lawson 2004: 154).

A "settler seeks to establish a nation, and therefore needs to become native and to write the epic of the nation's origin. The 'Origin' is that which has no antecedent, so the presence of Ab-orignes is an impediment" (Johnson and Lawson 2000: 365). Indeed differences within "Indigenous" communities of formerly colonized nations are so varied that to "compare" could also be to generalize. Differences are, of course, precious and by bringing together representations of Aboriginal India and Australia I do not wish to

dissolve those differences but examine how literary representations seek to do more than critique decolonization by gesturing towards spaces that speak of a decolonized future and, also, redefine the possibilities of representations in the process. Consequently, the texts in my corpus – Mahasweta Devi's *Imaginary Maps* (1995) and "Shishu" (1993) and Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria* (2006) – need to be read in relation to one another, and perhaps in connection with other cultures, because, to put it in simple terms, it is impossible to speak of these texts in strictly "local" terms though they address specifically "local issues". The definition of the "settler" is curiously close to the image of the "decolonizer," if I may take the liberty to use this word, because the formerly colonized subject is one who, by attempting to put into reversal the effects of colonialism, also tries to (re)write the "epic of the nation's origin" where the colonial encounter would be seen as a simple aberration. Since my project is also about literary histories, let me begin by problematizing "colonial" histories, postcolonial definitions, particularly that of the "settler," and the way these assumptions influence our approaches to contexts. In her introduction to *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies* (2000), Spivak writes,

> Weaver faults Mahasweta Devi for "speaking for" the Indian Aboriginal. Such confusions arise because, as Anna Johnston points out in "Settler Colonies," South Asia model postcolonialists have not come to grips with the fact that India with its ninety million Aboriginals, is a pre-capitalist, precolonial, non-European settler-colony, where the Hindu-majority Indian is, roughly speaking the first "settler" – and even such a formulation is mired in Aryanist nonsense. At the origin an aporia here, not to be compared to historically tractable situations in Latin America, South Africa, or Australia, each with its own complexity (Spivak 2000: xvii-xviii).

Mahasweta's stories on Aboriginal India provoke us to problematize this figure of a "settler" in terms of the dualities that it inhabits in order to understand the colonial

relations that were present in the subcontinent even before European colonialism occurred. (And, yet, in an analysis of stories that refer to Aboriginality in the context of contemporary India, we also cannot ignore laws, such as *Criminal Tribes Act*, 1871, that were legislated during the British rule in India.) The effects of decolonization in Mahasweta's stories that form my corpus, thus, teach us to historicize power relations, and require us to engage with British rule in the subcontinent differently. At the same time, and with reference to Mahasweta's texts here, one cannot rely on "history," historical events, and the past only, and invoke the traces of an untraceable history to counter processes of decolonization that are seen to be affecting the everyday lives of the Aboriginal peoples in India. In other words, while the histories of these Aboriginal communities may be disputed, and though they may not have any provable claims of "indigeneity," their subalternity is unquestionably real! But subalternity itself cannot be the basis of comparison because, as Spivak suggests elsewhere, to generalize the subaltern is also to lose sight of her (Spivak 2005: 476). Moreover, how can one really compare one's subalternity with others? There is, as I understand, another critical aporia here: although material conditions of oppression persist in Mahasweta's India and Wright's Australia, along with historical and socio-economic differences of the two contexts, neither of "history" nor "reality" are viable parameters, as it were, to engage in a productive comparative framework. Indeed, then, I wish to use a more inclusive term, albeit strategically: Aboriginality. The term, I think, allows us to "remember" the material conditions of the Aboriginal communities – who have been victimized due to different, yet structurally similar, historical factors – in contemporary times and their continued colonization due to processes of decolonization within nation-states. And the

term also allows us to interrogate questions pertaining to identity in relation to how they are mobilized and with what political goals. I will be elaborating on this later. The intractable histories of the Indian Aboriginals, as Spivak notes, are also somewhat unreliable because as they get "recovered" with only the help of descriptive disciplines such as anthropology, ethnography, linguistics and history, they would also inevitably reinscribe old colonial hierarchies and binaries that are imbricated with the settler's history. In "Pterodactyl, Puran Sahay, and Pirtha" (1995), Mahasweta writes,

> And who is going to tell us what is legend and what is history from the perspective of these totally rejected tribals? Where is the boundary between history and story? If we can get so much history out of the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, what is the problem with Shankar's nostalgia?How thoroughly rejected and forgotten these people are! (*PT* 146)

The task is, as we see, of recovering those stories and narrating those from the perspective of the tribals, and its challenges. *PT* is a story about Aboriginal India. In this section of the story, Mahasweta compares the Hindu epics of *Ramayana* and *Mahabrata* with Shankar's (an Aboriginal character) nostalgia in her attempt to suggest that these nostalgic memories, as circulated within the oral culture of the Aboriginal peoples, may, after all, have traces of Shankar's communal sense of memory. However, her vision of Shankar's nostalgia is not guided by an anthropological fantasy to identify something "authentic" about his community but to portray the community in its myriad complexities of everyday life as experienced under bureaucracy and exploitation. The government, we learn in the story, has decided not to declare Pirtha a famine-stricken land because it would have to take responsibility if it did so. There is a man-made famine in Pirtha and the government prefers to call it a "seasonal drought". We are told, "[o]nly Shankar is

literate in the surrounding villages" (146). His life is marked by both deprivation and an inscrutable nostalgia for his past. We learn he uses the infertile ground to cultivate whatever he can, "lives on the hillside" and "eats mainly the root of the Khajra" (146) and, more significantly, is unable to abandon his past. The narrative goes a step further in articulating Shankar's predicament in terms of a rhetorical question: "How can he...?" (146) And it is by presenting Shankar's "nostalgia" in terms of a rhetorical tool that the text revisits and reclaims a lost language of resistance.

Gayatri Spivak writes of a crucial "aporia" while suggesting the problems of invoking the history of a community that is inevitably reliant on its others. I think there is something to be learned from this strategy of locating history as somewhat precariously positioned in one's approach to Aboriginal peoples in the context of India, and, at the same time, being aware that an uncritical and depoliticized emphasis on the available versions of these histories would only enable forces of oppression to further victimize the Aboriginals. In this context, the notion of history, as we see in this formulation, occupies a kind of simultaneity that cannot be denied, and, yet, cannot be fully recognized owing to the lack of tractable sources. The history of the Indo-European language groups that migrated to the subcontinent thousands of years ago is embedded in the histories of Aboriginal peoples of the country; however, there are no tractable records of their histories.

Unlike the settler-colonial context of Australia, then, the notion of an aporia can also be interpreted in a powerfully productive way to locate history and its effects in literary histories of the oppressed communities. But literary histories, as I understand it,

are not simply substitutes in those instances where "real" history is not available. Literary histories are dynamic writings that foreground the alternative histories whether or not these histories are available, silenced or go unheard. Jean Starobinski describes history as "ultimately linked with literature in the making" (Starobinski 83). According to Starobinski, "[l]iterary history is above all axiological: it takes into consideration value judgements formulated in the past; sometimes it undertakes to revise them" (84). Thus, as several critics have suggested, interpretations of literary histories that share a consciously created unease with fact and fiction, the socio-political and the literary, must be reconsidered in analysis.

In this case, how are we to interpret the dedication of *Imaginary Maps*: "FOR ALL THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OF THE WORLD"? Clearly, there is comment being made on the popular histories of colonialism in her stories. The comment is that we may need to rethink histories of colonialism to engage with literatures that depict Aboriginal realities, under varied circumstances, in the aftermath of decolonization. In Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria* (2006), for instance, we have Aboriginal histories, memories and oral storytelling tradition being deployed to counter available versions of history. *Carpentaria* is a story about colonization of sacred Aboriginal land by a multi-national mining company. But the novel is also about the community as a whole and talks about a plethora of characters. We have in this sprawling novel Dreamtime creation stories being narrated that posit an alternative notion of time. The novel does not refer to colonization at crucial moments; and when it does, it does so in a mocking way. The novel, as I see it, requires us to take into consideration its highly stylized narrative, its humour, and caricatures of people who can herald mock-epic wars within the small town

of Desperance and cause it to split into two camps just by painting a statue of the Virgin Mary. It should, however, be clarified here that violence in Wright's narrative is not necessarily symbolic; instead, Wright foregrounds the life of a community with few deft strokes and focuses on "telling" a story. The novel begins with "A NATION CHANTS, *BUT WE KNOW YOUR HISTORY ALREADY...*" (*Carpentaria* 1) and celebrates an oppositional position; however, as we will see, it also "not" about the "other". It is, as I suggest, "not" about the "other" because, as we see in *Carpentaria*, Will Phantom (a character in the novel) is not portrayed as a "victim" of settler-colonialism only. Instead, we see him witnessing the creation of his own history as the novel describes it. An analysis of literary histories, thus, becomes crucial in this context because of the need to make official history present in the novel, and also reading it in terms of its association not just with a remote past but in the present time while anticipating a decolonized future. Thus, *Carpentaria* is about the visionary Will Phantom who comes to know the past and the future of the land like his father. And it is also about familiarizing the reader about the intimacy that the people of this Aboriginal community share with their land.

Angel Day, the woman who is known as the queen of her dumpyard, is infamous for causing the town to split. And her sense of a pride when she sees people of her community is telling of her feelings for her community: the Pricklebush people. We are told, "[p]ride swelled up inside her when she saw those with a landscape chiselled deep into their faces and the legacy of the ancestral creation loaded into their senses" (*Carpentaria* 27). However, in the backdrop of all this there is the reality: colonization that lurks above the life of this impoverished community. Thus, I suggest if we interpret Mahasweta and Wright's contexts within the rubric of Aborginality it would allow us to

remember diverse instances of colonization in contemporary times and move beyond classic postcolonial definitions. Also, we will be able to examine oppressive conditions that are lived as life by marginalized communities. Furthermore, we may also be enabled to examine how representations of these realities in fiction are not just "realisms" but stylized language that is also empowered to interrogate a loss; not a loss of self but, as Arundhati Roy suggests, a loss of language to critique power relations. Roy writes,

> Today, words like *Progress* and *Development* have become interchangeable with economic "Reforms," Deregulation and Privatization. *Freedom* has come to mean *choice*. It has less to do with the human spirit than with different brands of deodorant. *Market* no longer means a place where you go to buy provisions. The "Market" is a de-territorialized space where faceless corporations do business, including buying and selling "futures". *Justice* has come to mean *human rights* (and of those, as they say, 'a few will do'). This theft of language, this technique of usurping words and deploying them like weapons, of using them to mask intent and to mean exactly the opposite of what they have traditionally meant, has been one of the most brilliant strategic victories of the tsars of the new dispensation. It has allowed them to marginalize their detractors, deprive them of a language in which to voice their critique and dismiss them as being "anti-progress," "anti-development," "anti-reform," and of course "anti-national" – negativists of the worst sort. [...] To reclaim these stolen words requires explanations that are too tedious for a world with short attention span, and too expensive in an era when Free Speech has become unaffordable for the poor. This language heist may prove to be the keystone of our undoing (Roy 2009: 5-6).

Though both the authors negotiate with the similarity of "localized" effects of global capital in diverse ways in their fiction, my thesis is not about the differences in their approaches either. Mahasweta, for instance, focuses on naming specific places in eastern and central parts of India (Spivak 1993: 79). She refers to particular locations while making the reader conscious of the fact that these locales have been left out of

decolonization while being exploited to the fullest for "development" of urban locations. This also brings in the journalistic verve in her writing. There is, as I see it, in both these authors an attempt to capture a loss of language to critique oppression, as Roy suggests. Thus literature that "engages" with oppression could become a viable platform to address this loss. This "language heist," as we will see, may be claimed only through representations; however, our assumptions of representations, of literary histories, and of Aboriginality, need to be reformulated too, dare I say, indigenized. And this could require a certain kind of "undoing" as well. For such an "indigenization" to take place, as we will see in Wright's *Carpentaria* and Mahasweta's *PT*, the old equation between "fact" and "fiction" has to be modified, rethought, and needs to be tackled without hastily attributing an unqualified understanding of "realism".

I would like to clarify that "literary histories," in my analysis, are not histories of literature, or historical mapping of literary developments, but literatures that speak of historical injustices (as literary texts) situated in the present time. While there is no denying that these texts do speak of diverse socio-political and economic realities, I also think it is necessary to understand that in presenting these realities, from the margins, the writers I have chosen significantly reposition the "realism" of their narratives. Mahasweta's depiction of realities is strategically mediated through privileged characters at "privileged" moments. And, on the other hand, Wright makes the portrayal of everyday life "also" an occasion for a nuanced understanding of a decolonized future on Indigenous terms. There is, thus, a tension between historical facts, their repercussions in the historical present, and their literary representations that "speak" in the present time. And in ensuring that this tension, as presented by the authors I have chosen, remains clear

in my analysis I think it is necessary to consider literary histories as those that can be realized in their present and continuous "sharing" of histories (Attwood 2009: 225). Indeed, the equation between "facts" and "fiction" can, then, be rethought if we see histories as being rearticulated by the literatures. Thus, I will be examining these literary histories in response to official histories.

In his discussion of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation in Australia, which was established in1991, Bain Attwood, suggests,

> The term 'reconciliation' was never really defined, but the emphasis of the Council was relatively clear. Arguably it was primarily an exercise in nation building. It sought to unify Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples within the Australian nation and refused to countenance any Aboriginal political demands that could not be accommodated readily by the unitary nation-state, such as those requiring recognition of Aboriginal sovereignty (Attwood 221).

Attwood describes the role of historiography as undertaken by academic historians under the influence of the Council's history-writing and sharing initiatives. "[T]he council's history-making was historicist in that it treated history in the manner the discipline has usually done, as a matter of the past" (224). The council, thus, emphasized the "pastness" of historical injustices in terms of a readily available and already "shared" history that, according to some, only allowed settler communities to "lengthen" and "strengthen" (224) their association to the land. According to Attwood, this took place at the expense of insulating the present from the past. And, according to some critics, facilitated in creating "a distance between the past and the present that tends to deny the past its presence" (224-225). Attwood's distinction of "shared" history as opposed to "sharing

history,[1]" which has been favourably looked upon by several scholars, then, seems a useful one to remember for the purposes of my analysis because literary histories provide the opportunity for making articulations of historical injustices literally present in their stories. It is in their ever-present form of historical injustices that we may be able to rethink the decolonization has not happened instead of "rushing toward a future state of 'togetherness'" (Attwood 226). An idea that history could be easily "shared" – simply by recounting historical injustices – not only serves to make it remote from the present realities but also, indeed, insulates the past from the present.

On the other hand, when I look at Mahasweta's narratives of Aboriginal India, for instance "Shishu" and *PT*, I insist, on reading these narratives not simply as "speaking for" certain communities that have been left out national history of "India," such as the Indian Aboriginals, but as also responding to a critical moment in the 1960s and 70s in India that led to several intellectuals, like Mahasweta, to challenge Indian historiography. Mahasweta's stories, thus, also need to be contextualized in terms of the "factors that combined to alienate younger historians from the shibboleths of nationalist historiography" (Chakrabarty 2000: 14). The said "factors," in Chakrabarty's estimation, are "religious and caste conflict in postindependence India," the Indo-China war of 1962,

[1] Attwood refers to "sharing" of histories and defines the process in the following way.[S]haring histories acknowledges the simple fact that not only are there different historical perspectives of the colonial past but that these will continue to be articulated. It this assumes that the future of any reconciliation process will depend on a recognition and acceptance of ongoing difference – and so a good measure of contradiction and conflict – rather than involving an attempt to effect closure on a divided past. In keeping with the politics of difference underpinning this approach, sharing history is clearly informed by an ideal of democracy that departs from that which inflects shared history (Attwood 2009: 226).

and "violent outbreak of Maoist political movement in India" (14). Mahasweta, as a non-Aboriginal person, writing on Aboriginal India in the 1970s and 80s needs to be understood as a way of gesturing towards spaces, within the decolonizing terrain, that have been adversely affected by the "postindependence thirst for development" (Collu 1999: 48).

I have analyzed the specifics of the adverse effects of this brand of decolonization (simply as "development") in my chapter on Mahasweta's stories. Thus, here I would like to suggest that though Mahasweta is not a "historian" per se, her turn to Aboriginal India at a particular moment in national history needs to be examined as a "intervention" in itself. This is an intervention that is realized in her fiction, in the literary histories of Aboriginal India. Also, if "sharing history is clearly informed by an 'ideal of democracy'" (Attwood 226), then, Mahasweta's narratives of Aboriginal India could be analyzed as an instance of "sharing" in order to rethink this "ideal for democracy" in a decolonizing terrain. Consequently, we may understand these narratives as a critique of the India's response and reaction to its Aboriginal peoples. Speaking of India's rejection of the definition of "Indigenous Peoples" provided in the 1987 U.N. Report, Ronald Niezen writes,

> India, for example, has rejected its self-definitional aspect (included in the word "consider themselves") and has pressed for what I could call a "gatekeeper definition," one used to determine who can and cannot have access to U.N. meetings and the possibility they provide, however remote, of restorative justice. India has presented the view that it represents nearly one billion *indigenous* people (the entire population of the burgeoning nation) and that there is no need for others to present claims of indigenous ancestry that rival those of the state (Niezen 2010: 35).

The "reasoning" that goes into suggesting "that there is no need for others to present claims of indigenous ancestry that rival those of the state," of course, leads to the rendering the Indian Aboriginals unrecognized as "indigenous" peoples. While there is little doubt that in the context of "aggravated inequalities" (Findlay 2004: 368) as evidenced in Mahasweta's stories, claiming indigenous idenitity is not the issue at hand, and that the absence of historically tractable claims of indigeneity also forms a fertile grounds for subaltern alliances between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities in India, it is the direct effect of such arguments as experienced in everyday realities, which silences communities, and that we need to focus on when we read Mahasweta's stories. The emergence of history in the literary text may be understood as another interpretation of the "real" that is ruthlessly asserted by History even as it presents a past. It is a "real" that is realized in the literary text through its difference from the historical reality in "degree rather than in kind" (Spivak 1987: 243).

> That history deals with real events and literature with imagined ones may now be seen in difference in degree rather than in kind. The difference between the cases of historical and literary events will always be there as a differential moment in terms of what is called the "effect of the real". What is called history will always seem more real to us than what is called literature. Our very use of the two separate words guarantees that. The difference can never be exhaustively systematized (Spivak 1987: 243).

Incapacitated by the machinations of globalization[2], in the form of mining companies that are steadily devouring ancestral land that belonged to Aboriginal peoples, writers such as Mahasweta and Wright turn to juxtaposing histories, realities within the space of fiction and produce, what I understand as, interventions through literary histories. These narratives can be seen as explicating aspects of historical injustices and their implications as cultural documents can only be fully understood if we, provisionally, withhold our historically created presumptions, whatever they may be, and let the narratives speak. The tension between the two fields of inquiry only helps us to understand better what we can gain from such writings.

[2] My understanding of the term, in relation to postcolonial theory, is influenced by the following definition. -- "Globalization is a movement that is suffusing the entire world with a form of production based on free-market capitalism and an attendant ideology of individualist consumerism, postcolonialism articulates a politics of resistance to the inequalities, exploitation of the humans and the environment, and diminution of political and ethical choices that come in the wake of globalization. If neoliberal globalization is an attempt at naturalizing an depoliticizing the logic of the market, or the logic of the economy, postcolonialism is the effort to politicize and denaturalize that logic and demonstrate the choices and agency inherent in our own lives. In brief, this book will argue that if globalization is the reigning or hegemonic ideology in the world today, postcolonialism, at its best, constitutes one of its main adversaries or forms of resistance to its sway" (Krishna 2009: 2).

{Chapter One}

"Pterodactyl, Puran Sahay, and Pirtha" and Indigenizing Decolonization

In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon writes, in decolonization "there is a need for complete calling in question of the colonial situation" (Fanon 1963: 37). The process, Fanon describes, is "quite simply the replacing of a certain 'species' of men by another 'species' of men" (35). Decolonization, in Fanon, at times appears to be an idealized phenomenon that is also conditioned by its near impossibility. It is also this impossibility that in a way implicates violence as an unavoidable part of the processes of decolonization. Fanonian decolonization, as David Scott writes, is a "complete, a total, an unequivocal affair" (Scott 1999: 203).

> [V]iolence is not a simple act of will, but needs for its realization certain very concrete preliminary conditions, and in particular implements of violence; and the more highly developed of these implements will carry the day against the primitive ones (Fanon 1963: 64).

The colonial world, Fanon tells us, is "divided into compartments" (37). He warns that no society, however primitive it may be, can be turned "upside down" with programs of decolonization because the process is an encounter of "forces" (Fanon 1963: 37). Although writings of Frantz Fanon and Jean-Paul Sartre particularly emerge during the euphoric moment of national liberation, and thus appear to be far removed from the concerns of my text, we can still see anticipatory concerns in Fanon regarding the ways

such ideas of a neat reversal of the colonizer-colonized dynamic could work against marginalized communities, and would also seem to fail to have a clear grasp over colonialism itself. Thus, I briefly return to these thinkers to highlight certain aspects of decolonization that are pertinent to my thesis.

In this section, I will be pointing out the challenges that a cluster of writings such as my corpus posit in terms of its formation and analysis. I will be examining Mahasweta's novella *PT* in relation to some theoretical formulations to define my approach towards the corpus in general. And also to rethink the position of the reader/critic – who is always located on the "outside" because of his/her default position within privileged institutional structures that cannot not influence his/her reading of Aboriginal literatures, as we see in Puran's character, in particular. I will not be strictly comparing *Carpentaria,* at every step, while I explore with *PT*; however, I will focus on certain debates in relation to both the texts and lay the foundation for a fuller understanding of my approach in regards to the two areas of my concern.

While problems of misinterpretation of Aboriginal literatures remain at every step, I will briefly discuss the significance of my corpus in regards to authorship. I will state the reasons for bringing together diverse socio-historical contexts such as India and Australia because I do not see these as mutually exclusive of factors that contribute to misunderstanding works that could be identified as literatures that engage with Aboriginality[3]. I think there is something to be gained and, indeed, there is a political

[3] I must clarify here that I do consider Mahasweta's fiction, in relation to Aboriginality in the Indian context, to be literature that engages with Aboriginality, even though she is not an Aboriginal person.

value in reading different contexts together under the broad rubric of Aboriginality. Aboriginality, as I refer in one of my chapters, is, as Marcia Langton suggests, a process "of dialogue, of imagination, of representation and interpretation' that includes both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people" (Langton 1994: 99-100). Thus I want to mobilize a dialogic relationship between the Aboriginal narrative, its writer, and its reader/critic that effectively posits alternative ways of thinking, and approach towards analysis of Aboriginal literatures in the aftermath of decolonization.

> The word itself, 'research', is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world's vocabulary. When mentioned in many indigenous contexts, it stirs up silence, it conjures up bad memories, it raises a smile that is knowing and distrustful (Smith 1999: 1).

On the other hand, I am also aware of the various problems of assuming that the dialogue can easily take place. A dialogue implies an equal exchange of information and knowledge that would benefit both parties who engage in the act; however, in contexts where the possibility of an equation is thoroughly foreclosed, to assume the possibility of a dialogue is also to deny the fundamental concerns of my texts. It should be stated here that the indigenous tribes[4] of India who are the central characters in Mahasweta's stories

[4] The term 'tribal', indeed, has gained derogatory connotations and is problematic. However, I have used the term to emphasize the fact that these communities were affected by laws that were legislated by British colonialism prior to 1947 as they have been in post-1947 India. G. N. Devy suggests, "it is impossible to characterise India's tribals in ethnographic or historical terms. In the Indian context, the term "tribal" is too complex to be synonymous for "indigenous." The tribals are not necessarily racially distinct, nor are they necessarily original inhabitant of the areas they inhabit. Throughout India's history, communities have migrated, been forcefully displaced, and rehabilitated themselves" (Devy 2002: ix-xvii). The term also includes the tribal communities that were 'denotified' by the government in 1952. These communities earlier "notified" under the colonial law of *Criminal Tribes Act* (1871).

have been pushed to the lowest level of the country's caste and class demarcated society. In spite of the country's claim to a plurality of cultures, tribal animism, as Spivak notes, is not a recognized religion (Spivak 1993: 80). The tribals', also referred to as *Adivasis* (a Sanskrit term meaning "original inhabitants"), claim to indigeneity is not recognized by the government, and they have their own religion and society and remain outside the predominant Hindu society (Chakraborty 2004: 21). However, a large number of these communities have come to inhabit the caste structures of the Hindu society. Caste has, in a way, come to colonize the Aboriginal world and has absorbed many Aboriginal communities within the Hindu society only to exploit them for manual labour (Baer 2010: 622). In an essay on Bengali novelist Tarashankar Bandopadhyay's (1898-1971) novel, *The Tale of Hansuli's Turn*[5] (1946-51), Benjamin Conisbee Baer writes,

> India's *adivasis* 'original inhabitants,' tribals, Denotified Tribes, and Scheduled Tribes are, as this list of names suggests, difficult to define succinctly. [...] The Kahars are a more creolized mix. They are what the old colonial anthropologies calls "Hinduized aborigines," occupying the rigid yet permeable boundary between the tribal and nontribal worlds (Risley) (Baer 622-623).

As Baer suggests these communities are constitutionally recognized as "scheduled castes" and "scheduled tribes". India's high-sounding policies on affirmative action have done very little to eliminate the "aggravated inequality" (Paul Martin as quoted in Findlay 2004: 368) that exists between Aboriginals and Dalits ("the untouchables" who are a part of the Hindu caste-system) on the one side, and the "indigenous elite" (Chakraborty 2004:

[5] The novel has been translated by Benjamin Conisbee Baer and this is the translator's version of the title.

21), or the class that forms the middle-class consumerist section of contemporary Indian society in Arundhati Roy's writings (Roy 2009: 8), on the other.

The term indigenous, as a critic[6] suggests, means very little in relation to a "non-settler"[7] colony. The term, indeed, is "a referential word, operating in the twin context of colonization and disenfranchisement. It should not be an exercise in essentialism" (Chakraborty 2004: 20). However, if indigenizing can be a "strategically indeterminate provocation to thought and action on grounds that [...] the emergence of the so-called new economy has so far altered little the only too predictable global distribution of poison and prosperity" (Findlay 2004: 368-69), then, I take a clue from this non-essentialist approach of understanding and negotiating with indigeneity in narratives of decolonization about them. I argue that the "realities and dangers of 'aggravated inequality'" are crucial factors for reading Mahasweta's stories on Aboriginal India alongside Wright's Australia despite the Indian Aboriginals' complicated and unverifiable claims to being

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[6]Paulomi Chakraborty in her essay, "Framing "Always Indigenize" beyond the Settler-Colony: "Indigenizing" in India", suggests that the term "indigenous" when used in the context of India to denote tribals and *Adivasis* compromises their subalternity. This is so because in relation to colonialism anything that is a part of the country has been of/from the country, or could be ascribed as 'native', prior to colonial encounter, is considered 'indigenous'. According to Chakraborty, "It is then reductive in the Indian context to go with the dichotomy of the indigenous-outsider for the tribal peoples: clearly, the term indigenous, does nothing to address the doubly colonised status of the tribal peoples within the nation-state" (23). The essay is available on world wide web at *<http://ejournals.library.ualberta.ca/index.php/ESC/article/viewFile/335/311>*.

[7]I have already explained why Mahasweta Devi's "India" cannot be fully understood as a strictly "non-settler colony". While I am not suggesting to interpret Mahasweta's "India" as a "settler colony" either, the way Chakraborty defines the term in her discussion of Len Findlay's acclaimed essay, I think it vital to move beyond these debates of names and terms, of etymology per se, for the purposes of my analysis to address my argument.

"indigenous" to the land. In other words, I suggest decolonization in any context cannot afford to remain enmeshed in identitarian and essentialist questions pertaining to indigeneity when these "realities and dangers" loom large. At the same time, when we rely on literary representations, or literary histories as I prefer to call the corpus of my thesis, to address this "aggravated inequality," we also speak of a theft of language that is best articulated when our understanding of these literatures undergo a change - or, something that can be understood as indigenizing the reader's perception of decolonization as well. In recuperating this lost language to critique oppression, we may also have to transform our conventional critical reading practices and, indeed, focus on the "language of the written text" in order to appreciate the "literary intervention" that is embedded in it. I will be elaborating on this at length on my chapter on Wright's *Carpentaria*.

To suggest that Mahasweta is "speaking for" (Weaver 224) the Indian Aboriginals, which I will argue is not the case if one reads her stories closely, is, in a way, missing the point of her writing, apart from foreclosing the possibilities of literature that "engages" (to use Sartre's term), reveals, and aspires to change societal norms, assumptions and mores. As Sartre writes in "*What is Literature?..*"

> Thus, by speaking, I reveal the situation by my very intention of changing it; I reveal it to myself and to others *in order* to change it. I strike at its very heart, I transfix it, and I display it in full view; at present I dispose of it; with every word I utter, I involve myself a little more in the world, and by the same token I emerge from it a little more, since I go beyond it towards the future.
>
> Thus, the prose-writer is a man who has chosen a certain method of secondary action which we may call action by disclosure. It is therefore

> permissible to ask him this second question: 'What aspect of the world do you want to disclose? What change do you want to bring into the world by this disclosure? The 'committed' writer knows that words are action. [...] He has given up the impossible dream of giving an impartial picture of Society and human condition (Sartre 1988: 37).

Mahasweta's writing on Aboriginal India, as the author suggests, needs to be understood in the context of a widespread national ignorance about Aboriginal communities. The author in an interview says, "[t]ribal history is not seen as a continuity in Indian historiography" (Devi 2003: ix). In this interview with Spivak, she identifies the problems of historiography. Mahasweta puts forth a critique that is multidirectional: just as she is extremely critical of government policies that claim to assist Aboriginal communities – such as the 1952 amendment of *Criminal Tribes Act*, 1871, by the independent government of India – she is also critical of history and its varied repercussions.

> When the British left, they left our brains colonized, and it remains like that. If we have to know about the tribals we have to go back in tradition, re-read something that is not written, or written in human beings, generation after generation. [...] The tragedy of India at Independence was not introducing thorough land reform. A basically feudal land system was allowed to stay. A feudal land system can only nurture and sustain a feudal value system. A feudal value system is anti-women, anti-poor people, against toiling people. It is the landowners who form the ministry and became the rulers of the country. Why should they do anything else? (Devi 2003: xiii-xiv)

In the light of sustained ignorance about Aboriginal India, we may ask a few, perhaps dated but rather pertinent, Sartrean questions in regards to Mahasweta's fiction (and, particularly, because she "is not" an Aboriginal person) before considering them as mere documentation on communities that she, of course, does not belong to. In this way, I

propose to view Mahasweta's stories as literary and cultural documents that choose to disclose and change what it refers to. We may ask: "[w]hat aspect of the world do you want to disclose? What change do you want to bring into the world by this disclosure?" (37) Here, I think, is a possibility of particularizing Sartre's broad and universalist definition of the engaged writer to a context where we have a "visible political interest" (Spivak 1987: 205), perhaps "scrupulous" as well, in mobilizing narratives of Aboriginal India which, in turn, can be strategically used to form literary histories of historically harmed communities. As we will see in Mahasweta's fiction and in Wright's *Carpentaria*, Aboriginalities, in these two texts, occupy a nuanced relationship with the question of time. I am, of course, not comparing Australian Aboriginal notions of Dreamtime with Mahasweta's stories; on the other hand, I am interested in the play on the notion of time in their writings that can be productively interpreted. The engaged writer narrates, not just to resist in the present time but to imagine a future as well. As Sartre writes, the writer speaks, reveals, discloses, and intervenes in order to act in the present time and, simultaneously, aims to "strike," "display," "present," "dispose," "emerge" and "go beyond it towards the future" (37).

A brief example from *PT*, where we see an instance of Mahasweta's writerly commitment to mobilize dissent through use of words, will help me explain this better. This instance shows a particular perception of the reader (i.e. the protagonist Puran) being addressed and, indeed, manoeuvred by making him encounter the unfamiliar. Early in the story, Mahasweta writes of her journalist protagonist Puran's notion of the place that he wants to visit for his news report as,

> The survey map of Pirtha Block is like some extinct animal of Gondwanaland. The beast has fallen on its face. The new era in the history of the world began when, at the end of the Mesozoic era, India broke off from the main mass of Gondwanaland. It is as if some prehistoric creature has fallen on its face then. Such are the survey lines of Pirtha Block (*PT* 99).

Puran is asked by the sub-divisional officer why he wants to visit the Pirtha. The officer tells him, "[t]here is nothing more to be seen in tribal areas. You'll make a noise in the newspaper if you say anything, and more journalists will come" (*PT* 99). Puran, we learn, first encounters the tribal land of Pirtha through the survey map. He has no idea about the place that he wishes to investigate. The officer's description of the place as portrayed on the survey map is crucial because it reveals his and Puran's initial perception of the place and its people. Not only is the line of description influenced by a strict cartographic exactitude, it also attempts to read more than what the map offers. The map is, in a way, the primary text for Puran and his first task as an unfamiliar investigator, or "discoverer," is to internalize what he sees in the map and what he is told about it by the officer. It is interesting to note that he reveals more about his perception about the place and the people living there, in contrast to the other places that are depicted on the map, while he is seen to be "discovering" this new place from the point of view of the officer. This "perception," I suggest, may be understood in terms of the use of "cultural capital" in the text.

> The acquisition of a cultural capital is a politically ambiguous process: on one hand the colonized cultural consumer is subjected to a particular situation in which one culture, one form of cultural capital, has prominence; on the other the cultural capital is available to the individual consumer for a great variety of purposes, a variety of ways in which that cultural dominance may be engaged, and, indeed, resisted. This is the

> tension between hegemony and individual action. [...] Cultural capital is that capital that is presented to an individual as most negotiable in a particular circumstance (Ashcroft 2001: 43).

There is, of course, a strong element of the colonial gaze in this description of the lives and land of the tribal people. At the same time, this gaze easily reads as Mahasweta's scathing critique of postindependent India. If this is Puran's (and the officer's) "postcolonial" gaze of looking (back) at Pirtha through its depiction on the survey map, something remains to be said about his perception, at the beginning of the story, in relation to the journalistic report that he publishes at the end of the story after his encounter with the pterodactyl. If the massacres of decolonization by the colonial subject can be understood as the story's context, "cultural capital" is, then, what emerges in the text when Puran, the colonial subject, mobilizes his perception of this context to engage with Pirtha. I suggest that we, indeed, see Puran coming to terms with a kind of "cultural capital" by narrating his impression of this section of the land. It is by making Puran engage with the always-unfamiliar Pirtha, by employing multiple registers of dialogue between characters and a nuanced way of internalizing the derived information about Pirtha, that Mahasweta indigenizes the perception of decolonization in Puran and in the reader. Bill Ashcroft writes of a tension between "hegemony" and "individual action" (43) at the very moment when the individual accesses this "cultural capital". The officer tells Puran: "Come and see. What, looks like an animal, no?" Puran responds, "Yes. But these creatures are extinct" (*PT* 99). What Puran sees as fossilized presences of extinct individuals and "creatures" on the map is later brought to life when he realizes the stark distinction between Aboriginal peoples' "India" and his. It is Puran who, after his encounter with the pterodactyl and its guardian Bikhia, will say, "[w]e built no

communication point to establish contact with the tribals. [...] - To build it you must love beyond reason for a long time" (*PT* 195). While his call for "ethical singularity" (Spivak 1995: 201) "in thought and action" towards tribals does not absolve him from his complicities in structuring the space that has "no established agency of traffic with the culture of imperialism" (Spivak 1993: 78), it does provide us with crucial clues about his interaction with that which is "most negotiable" (43) at a particular moment – i.e. cultural capital, and what happens when this negotiation takes place.

While the section begins with the narrator / Puran's curiously colonized way of looking at the topography of Pirtha, it is also by looking at the map, by engaging with it visually, that he accesses and negotiates with a hitherto unfamiliar cultural capital that proves to be a viable tool to learn more about Pirtha later. In a way, this way of looking at the "survey lines of the Pirtha Block" literally rehearses Puran's realization that comes at the end of the story when he sees Pirtha in person. Puran's increasing knowledge about Pirtha and its people culminates in the news report that he writes at the end of the novella, and thus his impression at the beginning of the story must be read in conjunction with what became of them later. Puran says,

> There is no communication point between us and the pterodactyl. We belong to two worlds and *there is no communication point.* There was a message in the pterodactyl and, whether it was a fact or not, we couldn't grasp it. We missed it (*PT* 195).

In her Afterword to *Imaginary Maps* (1995), Spivak writes, "[a]ll collective struggles [...] must be supplemented by the memory that to be human is to be always and already inserted into a structure of responsibility" (*IM* 201). In Puran's gradual familiarization

with aspects of Pirtha we see his progressive realization of his responsibility. While this may seem hopelessly positivistic and idealistic, Mahasweta's story actually problematizes this when Puran encounters Pirtha and opens it up to a larger project of an indigenizing of a worldview. Indeed *PT* does not offer us any easy answers and only gestures towards this notion of "response-ability" (Eigenbrod 2002: 70). However, Puran's "negotiations" with his worldview during his stay at Pirtha offer a rich space to understand how this "cultural capital" can be understood and deployed by the writer to disclose decolonization and its discontents.

> There are no words in their language to explain the daily experience of the tribals in today's India. There are no words for "exploitation" or "deprivation" in the Ho language. There was an explosion in Puran's head that day (*PT* 118).

Later in the story, Puran says, "I am realizing how barbaric it is to photograph skeletal men and women" (*PT* 147). It should also be noted that the pterodactyl, which implies annihilation of ancestral land and lives to the Aboriginal peoples, does not get mentioned by Puran in his report that comes at the end. While I am, of course, not arguing for Puran's "heroic virtues," or his compassion in "understanding" the subaltern reality of the Aboriginal peoples, I think it is important to consider Puran's deliberate omission of his encounter with the pterodactyl from his news report in relation to Spivak's notion of the "double bind" (*PT* 189) in order to examine what cultural capital, when mobilized, can do within the space of a literary text.

Analyzing Spivak's take on the "double negative" (Krishna 2009: 98), Sankaran Krishna suggests that the double bind locates hegemonic structures as both "empowering and impoverishing" (98). These structures are to be "resisted, opposed and bent to one's

ethical concerns for equality and humanity, but one cannot do that from without; rather it is by inhabiting them intimately and working from within that one tries to change them" (98). "Spivak talks of these hegemonic cultures and structures as spaces one cannot not want to inhabit but which one is obliged to critique or change" (99). Thus if Puran is to make sense of the predicament of the Aboriginal peoples, and "love beyond reason for a long time," then, he must first understand how he is always and already implicated in the hegemonic structures of the national bureaucracy and the corporate media that he inhabits and, indeed, must continue to be a part of. At the same time, he must critique those as well in order to change them. Thus, I ask, how does Puran "earn" (Spivak 1990: 62-3) this sense of his difference from the Aboriginal community? And how does he come to terms with his privileges, his position within the power structures that he must also necessarily critique and seek to change? I will elaborate on this notion of "earning" the right to engage and resist with history in the following section of the chapter. It might be said Puran's engagement with the "double negative" by eliminating the pterodactyl from his report leaves us with the possibilities of engaging with constantly available moments of "re-mediations" (Lawson 2004: 154) in the aftermath of decolonization. In order to make the most of these possible moments of "re-mediations," one must, engage, intervene and negotiate from within the system. Mahasweta's stories precisely do this, and also teach the outsider critic to devise his or her strategies to be able engage with moments of "re-mediations". As Spivak suggests,

> If you mean that you have to make interventions in the structures of which you are a part, it seems to me that is the most negotiated position, because you must intervene even as you inhabit those structures. [...] all I mean by negotiation here is that one tries to change something that one is

> obliged to inhabit, since one is not working from the outside. In order to keep one's effectiveness, one must also preserve those structures – not cut them out completely (Spivak 1990: 72).

Puran gets to learn more about the remoteness of Pirtha. And the ways in which each piece of "information" becomes a part of his journalistic archive and, eventually, becomes suggestive of the indigenizing of a worldview within the text. During his exchange with the government officer Puran learns that the people of Pirtha had recently seen a "monstrous shadow fly by, [n]ot too big, not too small, a bird" (*PT* 103). Puran, at this point in the story, is completely unaware of the reality that pervades in Pirtha and asks for details about the sighting of the creature. He is told:

> Go to Pirtha. Explain this to them. I cannot make you understand. You are not understanding how it is in Pirtha. Pirtha is a place of perennial starvation. They have no resource, they never will. A few thousand people have now accepted despair (*PT* 104).

Cultural capital is, I suggest, more elusive in this context; however, it certainly relates to Ashcroft's definition in significant ways. According to Ashcroft, it "lifts the colonized subject out of the simplistic binary of opposition or a myth of passive subjection" (Ashcroft 44). It is, as we realize, certainly not pervasive in the deprivation that Pirtha embodies and, thus, does not reveal itself in an act of violent metaphorization of these realities. It is, I argue, the recognition, literalization of the material reality, and mobilization of those in the framed narratives of *PT*, that cultural and political dominance is "engaged and, indeed, resisted" (Ashcroft 43) through cultural capital. An interpretation of "cultural capital" as a potent tool for resistance lies in the interactions between Bikhia, the tribal boy who has seen the pterodactyl, and Puran. Such an interpretation of Puran's perception of Bikhia's world precariously also hinges between

possibilities of recovery and an impossibility of its complete emergence from their interactions. Nonetheless, these interactions have a provocative and enduring effect on Puran despite their complete intelligibility. His journalistic approach that marks this novella, then, partly signifies attempts to reveal that which fails in the processes of obtaining information but, nonetheless, could be affectively and intuitively explored only when this journalism is paired with Puran's "ethical singularity" (Spivak 1995: 201) towards Bikhia and his community. This is precisely what we see happening towards the end of the narrative.

Their coming together in the story marks a deep sense of impossibility of communication because, it carries a foreboding feel to it and, perhaps, this is also why the pterodactyl cannot be interpreted or explained to the world outside Pirtha. In a section that is told to Puran by an anonymous activist, and is woven into the narrative as an unrecognizable voice providing an "account" (109), we see questions emerging about specific aspects of Pirtha even while the social and economic aspects are laboriously described. There is a sense of something unfamiliar about Pirtha that cannot be explained. We learn that the soil in the state of Madhya Pradesh is rich in iron, manganese, coal, limestone and tin ore and that the Aboriginal people who live in the area walk on "broad arrogant roads" (109). The roads are built from money that has been allocated for tribal welfare. However, once built, the roads serve altogether different purposes. The road does not lead children from Aboriginal communities to schools, neither does it lead men and women to health care centers. It, however, facilitates owners of bonded labour, moneylenders, abductors and "bestial alcoholic men lusting after tribal women" (109) in directly entering tribal land. At the same time, Mahasweta's critique

does not stay there – and the following questions that emerge from a far more complex and multi-layered critique. "Why did the boy draw that picture?" (*PT* 109), "Who has engraved these cave drawings?" Are these pictures of contemporary human beings?" (*PT* 108) Of course, there is no immediate answer to these questions and the narrative only pushes Puran towards Pirtha. And these questions about the mysterious cave drawings, by the Aboriginal boy Bikhia, in a way, create the "explosion" (118) in Puran's head.

> Puran thinks, Do the tribals, whose life is nothing but exploitation, nothing but deprivation, have a synonym for "exploitation" in any of their languages? (118)
>
> Now Bikhia's eyes explain that this strange situation had made them one but they were never really one. As if in a strange situation of war two people from separate worlds and lives, who do not understand one another's language, were obliged to cross some icy ravine, or to pass an unknown and violent desert, and then complete mutual help became necessary. A time of danger had brought them together. Although their hands were clasped at the end of the episode of danger they realized that they belonged to two different worlds (*PT* 182).

In this context, it will be useful to recall Stephen Muecke's argument in his essay "History and the Sacred" (1999). Muecke argues that "the secular state finds in its foundation myths and rituals the same magico-religious forces observable in the rituals, the poiesis, of non-State societies" (Muecke 1999: 296). I interpret the repeated intersection of "facts" about the natural resources of the state of Madhya Pradesh (where Pirtha is located) in conjunction with the persistent query about drawings that are said be present in the caves of Pirtha[8]. Although it is not clear in the "account" if these cave drawings depicting communal life and the pterodactyl are of ritualistic value per se, they

[8] It should be noted that in Mahasweta's fiction the "national" stands in opposition to the "local" and, as Spivak notes, "Empire" and "Nation" are interchangeable terms (Spivak 1993: 78).

do have a high currency within the community. It is precisely because of their sacred character that the community seems to be protective about the place where these drawings are located. "Irrationality" and a concomitant sense of "mystery" are the only aspects of the community etched out for us as we are reminded of the sub-divisional officer's cautious words to Puran: "How can I make you understand that it is not possible for those tribals to think reasonably, to offer explanations? You will understand them with your urban mentality? You will fathom the Indian Ocean with a foot-ruler?" (*PT* 104) The great chasm between the State and its tribal subjects becomes most pronounced in the sub-divisional officer's words to Puran. However, the tribals are also inextricably engaged with the State, even before Puran decides to venture into Pirtha. The disconnect between the tribals and the State is belied by the fact that these subjects are perceived as "irrational" people who cannot "understand" Puran, and people who cannot "think reasonably" or "offer explanations" (104). The Aboriginals are, thus, already recognized as "others" against which the State defines and constitutes itself.

There is, indeed, a paradoxical image construed of the "State" with reference to the resources available in Madhya Pradesh and the simultaneous, and seemingly unconnected, queries regarding Bikhia's cave paintings. While the secular and prosperous state is narrated in terms of the resources it offers, it is, of course, implied that the mineral wealth and agricultural industry would not benefit the tribals. In fact, the State can only afford to be resourceful at the expense of the tribal population's prosperity. It is by othering, demonizing, and by effectively rendering the entire tribal population faceless that this State forms itself. However, the presence of Bikhia's drawings of the pterodactyl – an "empirical impossibility" (*PT* 204) for modern India and

the "soul of the ancestors" (for the Aboriginals) at the same time – is as a suggestion of an impending calamity for the Aboriginals. We may here note that the pterodactyl, which is reflected in the Bikhia's drawings, symbolizes a threat to the future of his community. And through the drawings' suggestive presence in the story, as telling of a calamity for Bikhia's community and an unrecognizable identity of this community that cannot be rationalized or decoded, they remain reified in terms of an anxious rhetorical marker (as questions of the sub-divisional officer). These drawings, in a way, symbolize the foundation of the State by participating in its formation as signifiers of a "non-State society" (Muecke 296).

Indigenizing Subject Positions

> And so it is not I who make the meaning for myself, but it is the meaning that was already there, pre-existing, waiting for me. It is not out of my bad nigger's misery, my bad nigger's teeth, my bad nigger's hunger that I will shape a torch with which to burn down the world, but it is the torch that was already there, waiting for that turn of history (Fanon 1967: 134).

> At the same time we must give help for survival. Otherwise, like the bond slaves of Palamau whom I've seen myself, liberated bond labourers will become bond slaves again in order to survive, because of administrative failure. [...] At the same time we must help their survival by creating forests, giving them poultry and goats and giving them work and food during the starvation months (*PT* 193).

There is a moment in *Black Skin White Masks* (1967) when Fanon responds to French philosopher Sartre's description of a cycle in the history of "Poetry" that emerges from the struggles of any nation, class, or any particular race. According to Sartre, in every age the "circumstances of history" (134) choose a particular nation, class, or race, "to take up

the torch by creating situations that can be expressed or transcended only through Poetry". He goes on to urge his readers to "make it possible for the black men to utter" (134). Fanon's response, as a subject situated within the period of a national liberation struggle, and Sartre's definition of poetry are telling and fascinating for several reasons. Fanon's critique of Sartre's impassioned plea, to make it possible for the black man to speak, monolithizes the figure of the one who would make this "possibility" as well as one for whom the "possibility" is to be made. It is also this compassion, in spite of all its "good intentions," that is seen as something that robs the black man of any agency that he might have had. The mantle of resistance, Fanon writes, was always already there "waiting for that turn of history" when it would be "bestowed" (134) upon the Black man.

Situated in the immediate context of a national liberation struggle in the 1950s, these two positions are necessarily identitarian. They need to be understood as responding to the urgency of an anticolonial struggle and the politics of representation of oppressed communities, and, to me, they do speak of progressive politics as well. But to do so, I would argue, these subject positions can no longer be read as reactions that are haunted by an unattainable ideal state of relations between the "oppressor" and "oppressed," or responses emerging from identitarian notions only. Instead, taking a clue from Puran's position, they work as ideational constructs of subject positions that must be remembered and negotiated at every step by the literary critic who engages with Aboriginality.

Remembering these subject positions in reference to one's analysis and engagement with Aboriginality should then function as a way of indigenizing one's

approach and method. In his erasure of the pterodactyl from his news report, Puran precisely suggests the need for both: the need to "make it possible" for the oppressed, or "help," and also a "scrupulous[ly]" (Spivak 1987: 205) examined recognition of the strategic politics of this "help". Also, in this way one would be re-reading Fanon and Sartre in terms of our needs and aspirations after decolonization. The "new myth" (193) is also not just about the pterodactyl, or Pirtha, it is a space for rethinking one's relation to both and the politics of the formation and circulation of such "new myths". It, after all, reminds Puran that the souls of Bikhia's ancestors will return in the form of an "unknown tired bird" (193).

Sartre writes, "sometimes the poetic impulse coincides with the revolutionary impulse and sometimes they take a different course" (Fanon 1967: 134). If we place both these subject positions within the context of a decolonizing terrain, where decolonization "as such" (Spivak 1993: 78) continues to work against oppressed communities, some crucial questions can be addressed that, I think, help to define this project. What happens then, I ask, when the revolutionary impulse of oppressed communities goes unheard? Who makes the "choice" at that moment in "circumstances of history" regarding a particular nation, race, or class, or those who would get to take up the torch of (literary) resistance? Indeed Sartre's key term "circumstances in history" is a capacious and precariously undefined term because the very dynamics of "choice," or who gets to be heard, who gets to voice dissent, and who gets represented, need to be deliberated in relation to decolonization as well, and not just during the euphoric moment of national liberation struggles.

Circumstances imply many contexts, situations and varied dynamics that work toward making history; however, circumstances that eventually make the official history do not get recognized in terms of their plurality. History thus, as we see in Sartre, is already acknowledged as carrying the traces of other histories that may not be heard. The revolutionary impulse may not, as Sartre indicates, coincide with the poetic impulse of the time. The term "revolution," in this context, unmistakably evokes a majoritarian view of the phenomenon. Consequently, in order to think of a revolution in thought and action emerging from narratives of historically harmed communities (of Aboriginal peoples in India and Australia) one would need to rethink one's assumptions about the structures that facilitate revolutions: an imagined "deep, horizontal comradeship" (Anderson 7) among the people that goes into making the nation. Of course, Aboriginal peoples who are minorities in their own countries, and remain colonized, are far removed from the possibility of this "comradeship" and, thus, do not have access to the structures that could facilitate a "revolution". I should, however, clarify that by putting forward these questions, I do not mean to critique the call for solidarity that Sartre advocates in terms of the spirit that it exhibits. Nonetheless, in order to reposition it, in relation to Mahasweta's and Wright's texts, I do need to dismantle the language used for this call in order to suggest that the "revolution," and an invocation of it, has to be "strategically indeterminate and provocative [to] thought and action". As Findlay writes,

> The necessity and difficulty of Indigenizing is no global shell game involving entities and essences that come and go according to sleight of hand or mind or cartographic ruse but an overdetermined play of forces and processes that produce particular determinate moments subjected in their turn to contestation and change (Findlay 2004: 368).

In the light of Findlay's comments, it is seems most necessary to me to undertake a comparative project that involves representations of Aboriginalities by a non-Aboriginal writer, such as Mahasweta Devi writings on Aboriginal India, and that by an Aboriginal writer - Alexis Wright. I do so in order to emphasize that Indigenizing is indeed undertaken under varied circumstances that are influenced by, and a response to, "an overdetermined play of forces and processes" (368). Considering Aboriginal histories in literary histories as I have suggested earlier, then, allows us to reconsider this "overdetermined play of forces" that reiterates colonial and varied power relations in the aftermath of decolonization and reconciliation in India and Australia. Thus, in order to challenge this "overdetermined" nature of "forces and processes," I argue, we need to reformulate our critical strategies, locate responses to History in literary texts, understand literary resistance in its own terms and, indeed, critically intervene in order to recuperate interventions.

There is, indeed, a possibility for the critic to intervene on the lines of the literary intervention of the writers I have chosen, because, as Findlay writes, these play of forces produce "particular determinate moments subjected in their turn to contestation and change" (368). It is in this moment of "contestation," or what Lawson calls "re-mediation," and "change," that I wish to focus on the representational politics of the texts that I have chosen. Since, as Findlay suggests, Indigenizing is "no global shell game involving entities and essences that come and go according to sleight of hand or mind" (368), it might is most necessary for us to reform our questions and assumptions to address the debates that refer to representational politics, the logic of metaphor-making, and reconsiderations of defamiliarized spaces when we examine Mahasweta and Wright's

texts. In focussing on representations, I do wish to examine, and emphasize on, the constructed nature of Aboriginalities, and the politics and necessities of such constructions that we see being debated in these texts. It is for this reason that I find Marcia Langton's definition of Aboriginalities – as being created through representation and a "process of dialogue" of "infinite array of intercultural experience" (100) – useful. While it is too easy to suggest that reliance on such a definition of Aboriginality easily "usurps" the agency of Aboriginal peoples in telling their stories, I would contend that if Indigenizing is no "global shell game," and undertaken due varied circumstances, we may need to rethink the "entities and essences that come and go" (368) and those that Indigenizing seeks to combat. The problems that arguments based on these "essences" create are, I think, best explained by Spivak in the following words. Spivak writes,

> Resisting "elite" methodology for "subaltern" material involves an epistemological / ontological confusion. This confusion is held in an unacknowledged analogy: just as subaltern *is* not elite (ontology), so must the historian not *know* through elite method (epistemology). This is part of a much larger confusion: can men theorize feminism, can whites theorize racism, can bourgeois theorize revolution and so on. It is when *only* the former groups theorize that the situation is politically intolerable. Therefore it is crucial that the members of these groups kept vigilant about their assigned subject-positions. It is disingenuous, however, to forget that, as collectivities implied by the second group of nouns start participating in the production of knowledge about themselves, they must have a share in some structures of privileges that contaminate the first group (Spivak 1987: 253).

I will proceed with two comments that, I think, need to be remembered by the critic of Aboriginal literatures. Firstly, as Linda Tuhiwai Smith – while speaking of writing about experiences under imperialism and their relevance to the indigenous world – rightly points out, "[w]hile the project of creating this literature is important, what indigenous

activists would argue is that imperialism cannot be struggled only at the level of text and literature. Imperialism still hurts, still destroys and is reforming constantly" (Smith 1999: 19). And, secondly, Spivak's old command: "Representation has not withered away" (Spivak 1994: 104). It is then the responsibility of the critic of Aboriginal literature to understand that s/he can only extend his/her services "at the level of text and literature," just as it is, perhaps, necessary for his/her readers to understand that it is vital to believe in the value of representations and their interpretations. This is so because a "reassessment" of this literature of "survivors of genocide" (Eigenbrod 71) requires a distinct approach that cannot be estimated in terms of its "immediate usefulness," whatever that means in relation to any literary text, to challenge imperialism that continues to hurt and destroy.

While the imperialism that continues to impinge on everyday lives of communities is not to be forgotten, the covert acts of imperialism – such as a manoeuvring of the literary reader's ways of thinking, representational and cultural politics, choice of language, and one's approach towards the text – cannot be addressed with uncritical assumptions/expectations about what these literatures of engagement do or hope to do. I, of course, do not wish to discount Smith's argument at all. In fact, I do think Smith's arguments are irrefutable when she says researchers enter indigenous communities with goodwill in their front pockets and patents in their back pockets. But Smith also suggests that the need to tell Indigenous peoples' stories remains "the powerful imperative of a powerful form of resistance" (Smith 1999: 35). Thus I also do not want to dissociate the notion of "response-ability" from the critic's role towards Aboriginalities (Eigenbrod 72). It is in the play on the notion of responsibility that the

critic affectively participates in a Spivakian double bind and, also, "earns" his/her right to critique even while inhabiting hegemonic structures. Gayatri Spivak suggests-

> I will have in an undergraduate class, let's say, a young white male student, politically-correct, who will say: "I am only a bourgeois white male student, I can't speak." In that situation – it's peculiar, because I am in the position of power and their teacher and, on the other hand, I am not a bourgeois white male – I say to them: "Why not develop a certain degree of rage against the history that has written such an abject script for you that you are silenced?" Then you begin to investigate what is it that silences you, rather than take this very deterministic position – since my skin colour is this, since my sex is this, I cannot speak. I call these things, as you know, somewhat derisively, chromatism: basing everything on skin color – "I am white, I cannot speak" – and genitalism: depending on what genitals you have, you can or cannot speak on certain situations. From this position, then, I say you will of course not speak in the same way about Third World material, but if you make it your task not only to learn what is going on there through language, through specific programmes of study, but also at the same time through a historical critique of your position as the investigating person, then you will see that you will have earned the right to criticize, and you will be heard. [...] On the other hand, if you criticize having earned the right to do so, then you are indeed taking a risk and then you will probably be made welcome, and you can hope to be judged with respect (Spivak 1990: 62-63).

The disconnect between the spirit of change and the recognition by those who get to choose, those who seek the change, is so because as we see in relation to Aboriginal literatures, or literature that explicitly "engages" politically and socially, the "fact of blackness," nonetheless, has remained even during decolonization. In fact, the "fact of blackness" has become more pronounced during decolonization. It is, as I later point out, not that decolonization has not happened in these countries but has occurred at the expense of certain communities. My reading of Aboriginal literatures problematizes Aboriginality - as perceived as an essentialized identity, and its socio-politically

committed representations functioning as simplified critiques of the present - by bringing together Mahasweta Devi and Alexis Wright's work. I would also like to mention here that I couple *Carpentaria* with *Imaginary Maps* in my corpus because, as we see in *Carpentaria*, of course, a striking commonality of thematic concerns: a coastal town in the north-western Australia affected by the flows and logic of global capital as emblematized by the presence of a mining company. And at the same time, as I explore in the next chapter, *Carpentaria* negotiates with its Aboriginality at multiple levels. Indeed the novel makes the rethink our assumptions of literary resistance in relation to "Aboriginal literatures".

The Indian Aboriginals, as Mahasweta's narratives of subalternity reveal, remain within the confines of the unknown Aboriginal world. According to Puran, the Aboriginal world is a "continent" in itself that has been destroyed by his "civilization" (195). In Wright's *Carpentaria* too, we see a "fractious aboriginal community living on the shores of the Gulf of Carpentaria" (Devlin-Glass 82). In her narrative we do not see a clear geographical/spatial divide between spaces; however, we learn that the Pricklebush community constitutes members who share a complex relationship in terms of their resistances, and in relation to highly permeable class structures within oppressed communities, to processes of decolonization. While in the context of Mahasweta's fiction we have a see a clear divide between the metropolitan centres within India and the "rural" areas where tribal populations live, in Wright's fiction this detachment from the "culture of imperialism" is deliberately metaphorized with references to segregation. The Aboriginal peoples in the town of Desperance, we are told, were separated from the people of the Uptown by an imaginary "net" (33).

suggest, I suggest, literary representations of Aboriginality that allow us to recuperate meanings of concepts that have been rendered void, in fact, articulate those very aspirations in different ways and must be recognized as such. If one is it push the call for solidarity encoded in the title of *Imaginary Maps*, literary representations provoke us to cross borders and read one text against the other. As Stephen Slemon writes,

> As a place for imagining resistances to globalising power, as a place for pursuing minority and civil rights on the way to social reconciliations, the nation-state, as a meaningful category, is now, simply, over. We have all become not just transnational but postnational citizens. [...] Because this is so, we must mount our resistances, pursue our reconciliations, in places outside the containments of national culture (Slemon 2003: 7).

Referring to the influence of "globalisms" in this argument, Slemon puts forth two cryptic formulations that, I think, allow us to reconsider aspirations of Aboriginal and marginalized communities from a new perspective. According to Slemon, "[g]eography is history," and "[h]istory is history, too" (7). While the notion that "[h]istory is history" could be misinterpreted, I want to emphasize that I, of course, do not wish to generalize histories, tractable or otherwise, of historically massacred communities. However, as I have suggested, literary histories of these communities, then, ought to be reconsidered in any given context. This is so because they allow us to imagine alternative methods of resisting oppression and reinscribing meanings to concepts that have been "deployed against" those communities (Roy 2009: 5).

> I have no doubt that we must *learn* to learn from the original practical philosophers of the world, through the slow, attentive, mind-changing (on both sides) ethical singularity that deserves the name 'love' (Spivak 1995: 201).

Puran, as we learn, is the "ordinary Indian" ("Shishu" 250). He is less of a character and more of a type[9] who appears in Mahasweta's short story "Shishu" as Mr. Singh. At the same time, it is also by focussing on the "ordinariness" of these characters that Mahasweta portrays a split in her concerns. Thus, I would like to end with the suggestion that by examining the local places closely *PT* and *Carpentaria* reveal a disjunction between Aboriginal lives and dominant cultures. They reveal alternative perspectives on decolonization as well. Indeed, if to critique oppressive conditions created by mining companies, government's confiscation of Aboriginal land, and systems of bonded labour implies seeking a language that has not been valorized by the free market, notions of "development," "progress," and "economic welfare," then, I maintain, an "engaged" narrative, from a socially and politically committed point of view, enables us to rethink decolonization without the violence that Fanon foresaw as being a part of the process. In effect, such narratives also liberate language by addressing this "language heist" that pre-emptively challenges a critique by putting the onus of supplying "alternatives" (to concept such as "development") on the one who critiques and attempts to write from/of an engaged perspective (Roy 5).

In this context it is also crucial to remember the problems of simply appropriating Fanonian concepts in order to understand the massacres of decolonization. According to David Scott, in the Fanonian problematic the "nation-state sovereignty

[9] I am not critiquing the stereotypical portrait of Puran here. Mahasweta's fiction clearly identifies subalternity of the Indian Aboriginals as an effect created by the complicities of the indigenous elite with global capital, the free market and its attendant ideologies.

constitutes the privileged political space of freedom, that space in which the ex-colonized are restored to their own history, and their humanity" (Scott 203). Scott argues –

> A Fanonian politics of national liberation is only intelligible when the currency of the nation state sovereignty has value as an unattained aspiration that counts in global politics. Today, not only do we inhabit the normative terrain of that threshold [...] but simultaneously the currency value of national sovereignty has vastly declined. To gain any sort of critical purchase, therefore, our oppositional questions, the revised questions about our futures, have rather to be those of unsettling the settled settlements of this very postcolonial sovereignty itself (Scott 1999: 204).

Since anticolonial aspirations of Aboriginal communities cannot be achieved within structures of the nation-state, Fanonian politics seem to be a thing of the past when we encounter realities that pervade the places like Pirtha and the small town of Desperance in Wright's novel. At the same time, Fanon's critique of resistance that is always made ready for the resisting subject is powerful in terms of who gets to articulate resistance, how, and how it is perceived. In a way, Fanon's notion of resistance inspires us to recuperate resistance as an abstraction that must, first, be protected and examined, in order to be realized in the multiple ways in which it is fictionalized. Fanon, as I have quoted at the beginning, also perceived decolonization as "the veritable creation of new men" (37). But this creation owes nothing of its legitimacy to any supernatural power; the "'thing' which has been colonized becomes a 'man' during the same process by which it frees itself". Looking back at Fanonian decolonization from the perspective of Aboriginal literatures, from the point of view of the critic who "earns" his/her right to criticize, one can surely ask – in the tenor of "[w]hy not develop a certain degree of rage against the history that has written such an abject script for you that you are silenced?" (Spivak 1990: 63) – why not rethink the "process" of decolonization, the birth of the

Fanonian "new men," as something surely other than as a transition from "the thing" to "a man"?

{*Chapter Two*}

Carpentaria: Resisting Elsewhere

> I have often thought that indigenous people cannot break through the deafness caused by the walls of the status quo that surround our containment, even if we wanted to, because of the layers in the maze of institutional violence. Although individuals might create something for either themselves or their people, as we see in the difficult work our people undertake across the country in the unconnected government policies of health, education, employment etc, our desire to survive as people in our own right, with a plan for our cultural future, has been impossible to achieve.
>
> I think one of the great lessons I have learned from the many of the important senior Aboriginal thinkers that I have worked with, is that fear comes with our dreams, and if you can learn how to conquer your fear, you can learn how to become a fearless dreamer and an instrument of possibility. I would like to think that the most significant work I have been asked to contribute to by various indigenous groups, particularly in Central Australia, has been to help build dreams for the future that were fashioned by ourselves. [...] Dreams that should have been easily accomplished have never been successful in accomplishing the Indigenous Self-Defined Dream for our future. These were brave dreams, but required others more entrenched in status quo's way of incremental change, to listen, to help build the ideas that many remote communities thought would work for the future.
>
> Alexis Wright. "The Question of Fear" (2007: 7, 11-12)

Wright's Australia

Alexis Wright's speech titled "The Question of Fear" was delivered at the Sydney PEN in 2007. In this lecture, Wright refers to the concept of fear and how it shapes the

worldview of Aboriginal peoples in particular and historically oppressed communities in general. Wright speaks of her personal experiences and their political and historical causes, and their implications. She describes her experiences while growing up as an Aboriginal woman in Australian society. According to her, the plight and feelings of the Aboriginal people towards the government can only be described with words such as "fear," "betrayal," "mistrust," "hurt" and "anger" (Wright 2007:13). She traces her affective reactions as a child to the political debates of the society in which she grew up. She says, "[w]hen I was a child I instinctively knew how thinly spaced I stood from potential harm" (4). Wright's focus lies in the "cultural future" of the Aboriginal peoples in contemporary Australia, and in order to strive for this future, she encourages her audience to be fearless in their imagination of the future.

The imagination that has been shackled by fear of violence and oppression needs to be liberated from its fears, in spite of all adversity, in order to move on towards a future. Referring to Oran Pamuk's Nobel Lecture delivered in Stockholm in 2006, Wright urges her audience, "[w]e must try harder to understand how to share this earth with others, who are demanding a new dialogue to create a greater equality that redefines the status quo" (Wright 2007: 20). As an oppressed individual, one is made to live in fear and this fear restraints one from imagining one's possibilities in the future. She insists that one needs to be able to overcome fear, one needs to fearlessly dream of the future not only to subvert oppressive structures but to reclaim oneself, to survive with one's "own right" (7).

Some of the questions that I wish to raise while exploring the notion of being able to dream fearlessly, at a strategic point in the present time when one is an oppressed subject, are as follows: How does Aboriginal writing choose to negotiate with this question of fear? In doing so, can Aboriginal writing portray a future or does it simply reiterate fears that were always felt and known but were just not spoken or written about? Is dreaming for a fearless future at all possible from one's marginalized position in the present time? What is the model of time that this dream has to conceive that would both include the past and the present in the future and not deny or just reiterate its immediate material context? I would like to mention here while this "future" through dreaming may sound hopelessly utopian to a "culturally-unfamiliar" or ideologically-conditioned reader, who is also aware of the magnitude of violence suffered by the Aboriginal people in Australia as we see in *Carpentaria* (2006), it is by no means "irrational". As Erich Kolig notes,

> The Aboriginal utopia is not a bold leap forward into some unknown redemption, nor is it a return to a past golden age. It is solidly based on real and reasonable possibilities. It is true to say, the new order is meant in many ways to be a radical departure from the status quo. But it does not constitute a flight into the unknown or the irrational (Kolig 32).

Also, as Kolig suggests, the use of traditional law, lore, artistic practices, literary styles and rituals does not mean a return to "pre-European forms of culture and society" (35). What is intended to be achieved are not "pre-White conditions, but at best a strengthening of the CONTEMPORARY traditional component in Aboriginal society" (35). Thus the notion of "a fearless future through dreaming" needs to be rethought in terms of Aboriginal epistemology as it engages with the challenges of colonialism. I will be

elaborating on this notion in reference to the Aboriginal concept of Dreamtime after I have provided a brief overview of my text of analysis.

It should also be remembered that Wright's novel was written at a time when the evocation of Aboriginal memories of colonization, perhaps, also addresses the need for an acknowledgment from the government with an official apology. The official apology, which was delivered on February 13, 2008, by the then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, promises a future where "the gap that lies between [...] life expectancy, educational achievement and economic opportunity" (Rudd's speech) between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians will be closed. The official apology apologizes. It refers to "uncomfortable things," things that are "profoundly disturbing," and commits to a future where Australians would "write a new chapter" in "the nation's story together". While I do not want to detract from the symbolic value of the official apology at all, it, however, needs to be realized that the "future" that an official apology, like this, envisions is a future that is envisioned by the one who apologizes. It is in this context that we may understand the call for the "Indigenous Self-Defined Dream" for that future that Wright's refers to in her speech. We may, thus, find a definite politics for evoking Aboriginal memories in Wright's novel; however, mobilization of these memories needs to be understood from the place of its commitment to a decolonized future within the literary history that is *Carpentaria*, and not just in search of an immediate "apology".

> Beginning in 1911, all states, except Tasmania, appointed a "Chief Protector" or a "Protection Board" with powers over Indigenous people. People needed permission to leave the reserve, to marry or to get a job. Parents lost all decision-making power over their children. In some states, the chief protector was made legal guardian of all Aboriginal children

> (Gannage, 1998). During this period, Aboriginal people were also being systematically removed from their traditional lands to "reserved" lands (Archibald 2006: 18-19).

While this legacy of colonialism in the settler-colonial context may not be unfamiliar, and does form the debris of reality to which several contemporary Aboriginal Australian writers and poets - such as Larissa Behrendt, Lionel Fogarty, Ruby Langford Ginibi, and Alexis Wright, to name just a few - have responded in their works, I am more interested in the scope of reading literary histories of Aboriginal Australia and possible redefinitions of Aboriginality for a decolonized future as evidenced in *Carpentaria*. More specifically, I will be examining the varied implications of narratives of "descriptions" about the town of Desperance, its people, its social reality, and the role of the oppressed dreamer as s/he envisions the future.

Aboriginal poet Kevin Gilbert suggests that the history of Aboriginal people in Australia since contact has been a history of "genocide" and "decimation" (Gilbert 1978: 238). The colonial past still haunts the present and the future of the Aboriginal peoples in Australia informs discriminatory policies and practices towards Aboriginal peoples. Encroachment and appropriation of sacred sites of Aboriginal communities, racially motivated violence towards Aboriginal people, along with effects of forcible removal of children from their parents and denial of citizenship and pass laws, all structure the everyday life of an Aboriginal person in contemporary society. In Wright's story, we also see the impact of multinational mining corporations on the town of Desperance. While this reality can, perhaps, be seen as the "common theme" in the work of more than one Aboriginal writer, I am also cautioned by the words of critics such as Debra Dudek (2002:

89) and Renate Eigenbrod[10] (71) as they suggest that one must pay closer attention to the text when reading Aboriginal writing. Referring to Homi Bhabha's concept of "cultures of survival," Eigenbrod notes, "[t]he recognition that these texts form by definition the literatures of survivors of genocide – even if humorously written – demands a reassessment of our conventional reading practices" (71). Eigenbrod cites Beth Brant's distinction between "reading with love" and an "exploitative understanding" to emphasize the need for an "affective experience" or a nuanced encounter of the reader and the text. Such an encounter, then, acknowledges this affective recognition of the context, and the commitment of literary representations urges the critic to form a "socially responsible criticism" (Episkenew 51).

But how are we to challenge our "conventional reading practices" in order to make the literary text mean something always more than the social factors that construct it, and, which are "also" critiqued by it? The problem, then, that I am concerned with is the precarious presence of the context that is there in relation to every literary historical text; however, I suggest this presence needs to be specifically reconsidered, addressed and tackled when those texts refer to communities and peoples that have been historically harmed in order to form not just a "socially responsible criticism" but also an empowering one. In Mahasweta's stories, for instance, the socio-political realities of Aboriginal India are the texts as are the symbolic and literary deliberations over those realities that, in turn, are mobilized as powerfully charged images that suggest both systemic violence (or "facts") and its thorough critique, i.e. a literariness of those facts.

[10] Debra Dudek and Renate Eigenbrod are writing in the Canadian context. However, their comments in relation to Native Studies in Canada pertain to my discussion.

Here, I am thinking of the ending of Mahasweta's story "Douloti the Bountiful" where Douloti's corpse is described as lying on a carefully drawn map on India that was meant to celebrate "Independence Day".

> Filling the entire Indian peninsula from the oceans to the Himalayas, here lies *bonded labor* spread-eagled, kamiya-whore Douloti Nagesia's tormented corpse [...] Douloti is all over India ("Douloti" 93).

In Wright's *Carpentaria* too, (as Spivak argues in "Planetarity" in relation to Mahasweta's *PT*) there is a similar defamiliarization of the familiar facts after the reader has been familiarized to them. I will be discussing "Planetarity" at length later; thus, I tease the attention of my reader by suggesting that in my analysis of *Carpentaria*, I precisely render the familiar unfamiliar/uncanny along the lines of a planetarity of critique. This is not to ignore the historical and political context, as I speak of that in this section, but to challenge "conventional reading practices" in order to distinguish the literary text that speaks of Aboriginality in relation to planetarity of connection as a "document of reconstellation" (Spivak 2003: 91) in and by itself as well.

The Precarious Context and a Strategy

> The postcolonial perspective resists the attempt at holistic forms of social explanation. It forces a recognition of the more complex cultural and political boundaries that exists at the cusp of these often opposed political spheres (Bhabha 173).

In relation to *Carpentaria,* an example and a crucial detour in my analysis will help me fully unpack the repercussions of not interrogating "conventional reading practices". However, I want to emphasize the fact that I am, of course, not reading strategies in Patricia Grace's novel *Potiki* (1986) in direct relation to *Carpentaria* as that would be a great mistake, and neither am I comparing Maori New Zealand with Wright's Australia.

There are, nonetheless, approaches that need to be clarified, indigenized, and a productive approach to one could be carrying the clue of a similarly fruitful approach to another. Here I am also encouraged by Gabriele Schwab's argument of reading violent histories in dialogue with one another. Schwab writes,

> I am indeed arguing that histories of violence can be put in dialogical relationship with one another. [...] [T]hinking about discrete violent histories tied to national or ethnic or racial identities cannot account for increasing global interdependency of violence, war, and genocidal and environmentally destructive politics. A theory of multidirectional, composite and transferential memory is more attuned than an identitarian memory politics to such global interdependency (Schwab 29-31).

While my thesis does not accommodate a fuller discussion of Grace's *Potiki,* I would like to refer to a reading strategy of the novel in order to define my approach towards *Carpentaria.* Here, I would briefly like to refer to Miriam Fuchs's remarkable essay, "Reading toward the Indigenous Pacific: Patricia Grace's *Potiki*, A Case Study" (1994), where Fuchs analyzes several critics who adopted a "cultural holism" (Fuchs 1994: 165) in examining Maori author Patricia Grace's novel *Potiki* (1986)[11]. Fuchs writes:

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[11] In her analysis of John B. Beston's reading of the novel, in his essay "Potiki," Fuchs identifies the dangers of a culturally holistic approach – one that "privileges a study of a system over analysis of the system's discrete parts" (Craige as quoted in Fuchs 1994: 165) – and locates Grace's novel strictly in terms of the plot as reflecting "symptoms" and happenings of settler-colonial cultural history in New Zealand. Beston's historical analysis, as Fuchs critiques, reads the *pakeha* (the Maori for the settler/white man) presence in *Potiki* as the sole determining factor in his analysis and focuses on the non-existent "plot" of the novel. It ignores the oral tradition encoded in the novel, and "the process of dramatic storytelling" (173) strategy whereby each "chapter" is actually characters talking to their audience ("the reader"). In Fuchs' analysis, the "culturally-holistic" approach does not allow Beston to move beyond the narrative line, which indeed talks about colonization of a Maori community, and, thus, renders him incapable of accounting for "important, basic elements – the title, the title character, and the title character relative to the apparent story" (172). Beston's charge, while analyzing a section where dynamite

> Critics who advocate holism because they believe it exposes colonial and postcolonial oppression and empowers disenfranchised communities must realize that they themselves, historically studied, are a late twentieth-century version of other Western scholars and observers who did not see themselves as an incursive presence; most outsiders historically have considered their causes to be just and their behaviour more ethical and justifiable than that of their predecessors. But if outsiders have always been problematic for the indigenous Pacific, which has both welcomed and cannibalized them, to follow Trask's argument to its logical conclusion would require that scholars limit their investigations to the most narrow perimeters of their own affiliated group (Fuchs 169).

The focus on the non-existent "plot," as Fuchs suggests, reveals a different problem in relation to *Potiki;* and this, I think, pertains to *Carpentaria* as well. The problem is a historically-conditioned holistic approach that sees the literary history only in relation to the other culture or the settler culture, which in the context of *Carpentaria* is the colonizing culture of "Australia".

In my reading, *Potiki* is, of course, about colonization of Maori land and Maori resistance to it. The novel does "describe" the encroachment of the settler-colonial presence on sacred Maori land at some point in the last century, the mysterious death of the youngest child in the family, the destruction of the *wharenui* (the communal house) by fire, rising unemployment in a Maori community, and explosives blasting on

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is seen to be exploding at construction sites that were originally sacred Maori land, that "Grace has joined the ranks of the Maori who believe that justice can only be obtained by direct action" (172), then, surely comes across as a critical flaw that cannot not judge even when it simply claims to "describe" the "plot" of the novel. Beston's incapacity to see beyond the "plot," in turn, is telling of the fact that a holistic approach always denies a nuanced understanding the finer things that happens in a literary history.

traditional land. However, Maori resistance to colonization of land, as described in the novel, happens in a curiously clandestine way. The Maoris destroy the construction sites on sacred land with dynamites. At the same time, these events take place somewhat "matter-of-factly," and are seen as part of the given backdrop that *Potiki* is also "not" about. "Resistance" to colonization is, in a way, already there in *Potiki.* An instance of a dynamite explosion and the effect it has on the Maori community is described in the following manner by the character Roimata Kararaina:

> It was in sleep that dawn exploded, and at dawn that sleep exploded. The house shook and somewhere there was a fall of glass. I dressed slowly and went out, not because of fear or worry, but out of curiosity, or a need to be with others, or a need not to be alone (*Potiki* 166).

We are not told who exploded the dynamite. Was it the *pakeha*? Or the Maori resisting the *pakeha*? The novel tells us it all happens in darkness. The point of initiating a "whodunit" analysis by focusing on a "plot" that is absent, just like one for Indigenous "resistance" to colonialism, is already nullified in *Potiki.* The point is this: of course the Maoris resisted. We, thus, see something in "excess" in the narrative that is always more than just the "real story" of colonization. It is here that we realize the urgent need to reconsider a novel, such as *Potiki,* when it also offers a literary history of a historically oppressed community, and in a way that will, of course, not be familiar to every historical and cultural "other". *Potiki,* as a literary history, can only proceed after History and its facts have been rehearsed in the background and already made familiar; which is also a way of resisting by deliberately making official history seem somewhat redundant. The destruction of the ancestral land, then, is not an occasion for it to be described, or

literalized in Grace's fiction in order to "resist," or talk "at" settler New Zealand, but to tell us that it is also a moment of communal mourning when, as we learn in Roimata's speech, every member of the community needs to come together.

An acknowledgement of this need to come together – in the event of the fact that destruction and colonization of sacred land has happened – is also, perhaps, indicative of a possible way of communal healing. Thus, what I take from this, in my analysis of the storytelling techniques in *Carpentaria*, is that resistance is "elsewhere" because Indigenous literary resistance, as I suggest in relation to *Carpentaria*, also carries a commitment to the decolonized future. In analyzing *Carpentaria* in this way, I find it more productive to engage with the text first, instead of reading "resistance" onto it. By doing so, I interpret notions of a future that is decolonized on Indigenous terms as it challenges oppression in everyday lives by thinking through the historical past. Indeed, then, a historical or plot-based approach to the novel in order to gauge what the novel thematically refers to is risky because it forecloses the possibilities of coming to terms with what literary histories could, and do, offer; something necessarily more than facts. As Fuchs writes,

> [B]y assuming it to be no more than its plot, critics reduce this complex novel to the familiar, representative Pacific tale of indigenous people versus *pakeha.* Although this surface story does have validity, *Potiki* supersedes the past two centuries of New Zealand's geopolitics (Fuchs 170-71).

Conversely, I would also suggest that a holistic approach, which is only attuned to the plot and themes, could also be critiqued on the grounds of promoting a deeply problematic understanding of "realism" in relation to texts that speak of colonized

cultures in general and literary histories in particular. It is to say, Grace's *Potiki* depicts a particular social reality from an oppositional position because it "is" a documentation of Maori New Zealand. In other words, *Potiki,* in a holistic approach, remains less of a literary text that ought to be read a cultural document first, in the light of its context, and more of a text that is always already marked by the historical and the political. In relation to *Potiki*, we need to note that Grace often leaves Maori words untranslated, she does not provide a glossary, and refers to song-poems and Maori proverbs that are nearly impossible for the "outsider" reader to decode. The "outsider" reader, unlike the central character Toko, does not have the "special knowing," but, at the same time, s/he "knows," perhaps, partly intuitively and partly affectively.

> Reading *Potiki*, then, not for its confrontational plot but as a series of predominantly spoken chapters, we find that almost nothing takes place, for almost everything has already occurred (Fuchs 174).

Spivak, while analyzing the need for a nuanced engagement with metaphors in Mahasweta's fiction in translation, critiques a western understanding of "realism" in "Third World literature in English in translation" as one that has "not yet graduated into language-games" (Spivak 1987: 268). If a culturally holistic approach does not allow the critic to appreciate the "language-games" – as I see pervasive in both *Potiki* and *Carpentaria* – it also identifies the literary text that speaks of Aboriginality as one that has "not yet [12]graduated" into a "state" where it can speak what it wants to. Instead, an Aboriginal literary text, under the (western) eyes of a holistic approach, speaks of

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[12] I am, of course, not assuming all Aboriginal literary texts are the same in terms of "plot". At the same time, a need for a complex understanding of language in relation to storytelling as documented in novels, as we see in *Potiki* and *Carpentaria*, needs to be aware of this.

everything other than "language-games,'' as it were, and remains reified in western assumptions of "realism" when it is analyzed solely on the lines of a "plot".

Here, it would be useful to remember Terry Goldie's argument where Goldie in his critique of violence, as functioning against colonizing forces in form of "resistance," and when it gets perceived as a "standard," suggests that when violence becomes, "a standard commodity, a value of Other, a reflection through which to explore the self" (Goldie 1989: 88), the formerly reified self is not able to overcome or challenge its reification. Instead it reinforces its own reification. "A liberating violence," says Goldie, "would enable the indigene to somehow subvert the text and deny the violent native as object through an even stronger subjectivity" (88). To push Goldie's argument further, on the lines of "standardization" of varied features of *Carpentaria*, the "vantage position of the colonized'' (Smith 1999: 1) may, actually, prove to be disadvantageous for the colonized if this "advantage" (or "disadvantage") is too hastily attributed to the literary history that attempts to speak in its own way. These "language-games," as it were, are "also" always present in Aboriginal literatures, as we see in *Potiki*, and must be recognized by the critic in relation to the cultural context that each text refers to. In order to do so, however, I need to take a different approach to *Carpentaria,* and strategically abandon the "conventional reading practice". I particularly need to be able to do this because in relation to texts, such as *Carpentaria,* there is a split in the given context. The "context" for *Carpentaria* is both Wright's Australia and the settler-colonial Australia.

Textually Speaking

> In this salutary sense, a range of contemporary critical theories suggest that it is from those who have suffered the sentence of history – subjugation, domination, diaspora, displacement – that we learn our most enduring lessons for living and thinking. There is even a growing conviction that the affective significance of social marginality – as it emerges in non-canonical cultural forms transforms our critical strategies (Bhabha 172).

Carpentaria speaks of Wright's Australia, which the narrator knows intimately, and the "Australia" that is seen as the colonizer. The context is both Indigenous and settler where the past and the future come together to make a narrative present which defies easy understanding. The novel is set in contemporary Australia; however, owing to its mock-epical structure of narration the temporal framework is largely indeterminable as the narrative keeps shifting between Aboriginal memories that reflect colonization and a gradually unfurling present. The temporal background of the novel is marked with presences of mining companies, and events lived in the everyday lives of Aboriginal characters. Aboriginal youth are seen to die in police custody, there is the race-related murder of the stranger Elias Smith who came to Desperance (the town where the novel is set) from nowhere, and has no recollection of his past. Normal Phantom and his family are the protagonists of the novel. The novel begins by mapping the social effects of intensive mining that took place on Aboriginal land. The novel tells us, "[f]ighting, fighting all the time for a bit of land and a little bit of recognition" (11). In this way, the novel foregrounds "resistance" as a part of everyday life because for the Indigenous character, such as Normal Phantom, the everyday reality does not allow a separate imagination without struggle.

While I will be specifically talking about the historical and political contexts that shape Wright's novel, I hesitate to draw easy connections to "resistance" when I look at the text. Instead, I gesture towards possibilities of resisting presences in the material realities and strategically positioned notions and ideologies (in the guise of rather eccentric and humorous characters) that are foregrounded in the text, as they gradually gain an added symbolic value in the narrative. I would like to clarify that the "material realities" that I consider in this text are the wasteland that the town of Desperance is depicted to be, and the central character Normal Phantom's seemingly eccentric art form of painting dead fishes and preserving them. While his son Will Phantom, the "separatist guerrilla whose mission is to blow up the mine" (Devlin-Glass 84), depicts a particularly aggressive form of resistance, and, is also strangely affected by his father's "pacifist forms of activism" (84), Elias Smith remains a brilliant characterization whose sudden appearance in town enables the town to remember its communal past.

Marcia Langton suggests that "Aboriginality" is "a field of intersubjectivity in that it is made over and over again in a process of dialogue, of imagination, of representation and interpretation. Both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people create 'Aboriginalities'... in the infinite array of intercultural experience" (Langton 99-100). It is, then, Langton's liberatory definition of Aboriginality that I wish to focus on in analyzing Wright's Australia because it allows me the possibility of interpreting *Carpentaria* from the point "of imagination, of representation" that lies in a moment of simultaneity "in the infinite array of intercultural experience". Langton's definition also allows us to pluralize Aboriginality in terms of representational politics.

This chapter attempts to build on Langton's definition of Aboriginality not only because it locates Aboriginality as emerging from the encounter of the reader and the text that speaks of Aboriginal narratives, and challenges strict identitarian notions around Aboriginality, but also allows one to examine Aboriginality in relation to specifics of representation and style that enable a closer examination of the text to explore an engagement with a decolonized future. Thus considering the rather familiar "descriptions" of land, "issues," its people, and what they make of the land in *Carpentaria,* becomes particularly important because they form something more than a critique of the present. We also need to consider here that in *Carpentaria,* Wright provides us with an epic vision of the Aboriginal history in this novel and the novel indeed plays with the concept of time from an Aboriginal point of view. Thus the linear view of time is absent in the novel at crucial moments when the novel attempts to construct a future through Indigenous self-empowerment that encapsulates both loss and hope, and the challenges to the Aboriginal imagination with the advent of colonialism. Let me explain this point with a reference to a section from the novel.

Elias Smith, a mysterious traveller, occupies a central position in the earlier part of the novel. This is so because his sudden arrival makes the Pricklebush people think through the white laws that govern their land as they become more curious about the histories of white people in the Uptown. Elias' arrival and absence of a memory is recorded in the communal memory as a lore. The novel says,

> Once upon a time, not even so long ago, while voyaging in the blackest of midnights, a strong man who was wizard of many oceans, had his memory stolen by thieving sea monsters hissing spindrift and spume as they sped away across the tops of stormy waves grown taller than the trees.

> The mariner, robbed of fear, his navigation birthright and his good sense, did not call to his God, but cursed the raging sea in the foulest language of his homeland (*Carpentaria* 43).
>
> The closer Elias came, the more the little cloud of people moved backwards to higher ground. Even the edge mob, standing way off in their Eastside and Westside camps in groups of their own with their black heads high above the long grass, could hear those Uptown folk describing to each other the vision splendid as a marvellously hideous *other* kind (*Carpentaria* 62-63).

There is an epical and mock-epical quality to this narration. While the act of recording events from memory tells us of processes of communal histories in the making, it also, simultaneously, reveals the conditions in which oral histories are formed within the community. The fact that memories of experiences, or lack of any, are transformed into oral histories, and are circulated within this community over generations, is not simply revealed as a pre-given sociological assumption or method of archiving events in this text. Wright uses specific instances, such as Elias's arrival, to reveal how these archived events can be invoked strategically to locate a larger critique that speaks of the historical basis of "arrival" of the "other" (who becomes a part of the Aboriginal society) in order to envision a future that needs to come to terms with it. Because the individual does not have the central position in Wright's novel, and is seen as subordinate to the communal[13]

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[13] Thomas King in his essay "Godzilla vs. Postcolonial" theorizes the focus on community, as opposed to the individual, in Aboriginal narratives as pertaining to what he calls "associational" features. According to King, "[a]ssociational literature, most often, describes a Native community. While it may also describe a non-Native community, it avoids centering the story on the non-Native community or on a conflict between two cultures, concentrating instead on the daily activities and intricacies of Native life and organizing the elements of plot along a rather flat narrative line that ignores the ubiquitous climaxes and resolutions that are so valued in non-Native literature. In addition to this flat narrative line, associational literature leans towards the group rather than single, isolated character, creating a fiction that de-values heroes and villains in favour of members of a community, a fiction which eschews judgements and conclusions" (King

identity, we are also told that along with Elias's arrival something else, and more significant than his arrival without a memory of his past, happened on the same night that he came to Desperance. It was at the precise moment that Elias was trying to save his identity "another unusual thing happened in this part of the world" (43). The sea storm that caused Elias to lose his way had also made its presence felt in Desperance as a dry storm. So, on the next morning when everybody wakes up to witness a hitherto unfamiliar Desperance, we see that things have changed. Although the damage is regarded as "minimal," the Uptown bureaucrats wake up with strange things happening to them. The epical story tells us that their skin color changed to red and they felt "static electricity" (45) in every object they touched. They felt sick and smelt "putrid salt" in the air "from the odour of stinking corpses washed off the stagnant floor of the ocean and dumped nilly pilly at their doorsteps" (46). The narrator concludes that it was not a funny feeling for the white people in Desperance, or for any town that believed in the Bible's version of history, to be reduced to a sheer feeling of "primordial insecurity".

The singular event of Elias' journey to Desperance is remembered in terms of Jonah being swallowed by the fish and moved towards Nineveh and, again, this knowledge of the Biblical allusion is critiqued because it reached the Aboriginal people of the Pricklebush community due to the colonial encounter and the presence of missionaries. This is precisely why I would like to suggest that the act of looking back to

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2004:187). While this definition works well in regards to *Carpentaria*, my chapter looks at what this aspect of "association," portray through details and descriptions of everyday life, with specific aspects of the novel.

the Aboriginal histories, through the lens of the present-day reality which reflects dispossession of ancestral land, informs the reader of the organic connection that the Pricklebush people have with their stories of the land, and stories that remember the land since the beginning. However, it also needs to be distinguished from a simple act of remembering pre-colonial conditions. As a result, "remembering," "archiving," and narrating need to be reconsidered in terms of how things are remembered, in what contexts of the present time, as opposed to what is remembered. In this context, it would also be useful to look at Bill Ashcroft's definition of literary resistance. Ashcroft writes –

> If resistance is *never* a simple and transparent polarity, if textual resistance is necessarily a mediated act, then our notion of what resistance actually means, what it entails, what kind of act it implicates, must undergo a radical adjustment. [...] If resistance is sometimes ambivalently situated, it is also open to a wide horizon of possible forms, forms which often look very different from resistance but which stem from the desire for indigenous self-empowerment [14] (Ashcroft 2001: 32).

> The old people gave the little kids whom they had sent into Uptown every day to get educated, a job to do. *Go*, they told the schoolkids, *search through every single line of all those whitefellas' history books*. The little boys and girls flicked through all the damp pages to find out the secrets of the white people. They reported finding not one single heroic deed about Uptown. The old people almost flogged those kids for lying about white people, or laziness, or both (*Carpentaria* 57-58).

The Elias story moves a step further when his arrival makes the Pricklebush people curious about the history of the white community. They ask their children, who were

[14] Ashcroft builds on Stephen Slemon's argument from his essay "Unsettling the Empire: Resistance Theory for the Second World" (1990). Slemon argues, "a theory of literary resistance must recognize the inescapable partiality, the incompleteness, the untranscendable ambiguity of literary or indeed any contra/dictory or contestatory act which employs a First World medium for the configuration of a Third-World resistance" (1990: 38).

already attending the white man's school, to carefully go through the white man's history books. Indeed, the town of Desperance appears paralyzed until Elias' arrival and begins to view itself differently and question authority with the arrival of this character. However, something else happens when the narrator recounts this change that takes place. We are told the old people asked the kids to "*search through every single line of all those whitefellas' history books*". The scripting of this "command" is emphasized in the text with the use of italics and, in a way, this very command is memorialized within the text as something that not only had had happened, but something that is internalized, shared in a tone of mockery as it is narrated. This coming to terms with the "command," which was realized as a need for the search for history at a particular moment in the community, in turn, becomes telling of a critique that is profoundly multidirectional. It is an irony that mocks the Pricklebush community, which had mistakenly assumed that there could be something found in the whitefellas' history books that would validate their claim over the land. Hence we have the rather humorous outrage at the children when they did not bring any "good news". However, by narrating this incident in a mock-humorous tone, the text grounds history in strictly communal and personal terms, and locates these events in a past (tense) that is also the narrative present: "little boys and girls flicked" and they "reported".

In terms of the stylized description of this communal "realization," the humour that seeks to familiarize the reader about the peculiarities of the community, also, serves as a story about colonization within the stories. Thus, the "realization" for the community may be in terms of the "fact"; however, for the reader, the realization of the dynamic nature of the story also lies in an acknowledgment of the way it is "acted" out. All these

little stories, indeed, speak of historical events. At the same time, it is the humorous and nuanced telling of the stories that makes them more significant than what they eventually reveal. It is so because in the act of dramatic telling we see a sense of communal history being shaped, as opposed to the national history that the narrator sets forth to critique at the beginning of the novel. It is in this context that I find Ashcroft's definition of literary resistance useful. For, as he says, "[i]f resistance is sometimes ambivalently situated, it is also open to a wide horizon of possible forms, forms which often look very different from resistance but which stem from the desire for indigenous self-empowerment" (Ashcroft 32). Literary resistance is, then, not in the "fact" but in the act of storytelling and needs to be interpreted as such. We see that it is by examining events, and through their stylized representation, that Wright's text depicts a literary history of this Aboriginal community's challenge to colonialism in a moment of realization of these nuances in the text. Resistance, then, is more consciously and carefully worked out in this literature in multiple ways that refer to the colonial history, and, thus, needs to be recuperated and interpreted in light of its literary mediations.

> ONE EVENING IN THE DRIEST GRASSES IN THE WORLD, A CHILD WHO WAS NO STRANGER TO HER PEOPLE, ASKED IF ANYONE COULD FIND HOPE. [...] THE CLOCKS, TICK-A-TY TOCK, LOOKED AS THOUGH THEY MIGHT RUN OUT OF TIME. LUCKILY, THE GHOSTS IN MEMORIES OF THE OLD FOLK WERE LISTENING, AND SAID ANYONE COULD FIND HOPE IN THE STORIES: THE BIG STORIES AND THE LITTLE ONES IN BETWEEN. SO... (*Carpentaria* 12).

> The coming of Elias Smith generated an era of self-analysis not seen in the Gulf for a very long time. The truth was you had to think about Uptown more carefully, for those people had more than one legend about how they got to belong to a place (*Carpentaria* 56).

When the children report that their history books carry no evidence of any "heroic deeds" and do not refer to their religious places of worshipping, the people of the Pricklebush, who were already convinced of the white man's heroism, accuse their kids of lying about the people who make the Uptown community. The fact that these people occupied the part of Pricklebush land that was "too holy to walk on" (58) and did not possess historical records of "heroism" in their history books, which were taught to the Aboriginal children, is something that also provokes the elders of the community to question the white man's authority over them. Elias's arrival in the present time thus triggers a series of events that only causes the resurfacing of tensions that were seemingly forgotten. His arrival is described in Biblical terms, appropriated in the nascent communal memory, and makes this Aboriginal community pose larger questions to the Uptown (white) people. In effect, there are several acts of resistances that spark off with Elias' arrival both within the community, in regards to the formation of communal histories and in their literary representation in the novel. The Uptown people do not have much to substantiate their claims of authority over the Pricklebush. Their claim that "all people were born without lands and came to Desperance carrying no baggage" (61) is no longer acceptable to the community that is better informed now.

Decolonization has been defined as follows:

> [It is a] process of revealing and dismantling colonialist power in all its forms. This includes dismantling the hidden aspects of those institutional and cultural forces that had maintained the colonialist power and that remain even after political independence is achieved. Initially in many places in the colonized world, the process of resistance was conducted in terms or institutions appropriated from the colonizing culture itself. This was only to be expected, since early nationalist had been educated to perceive themselves as potential heirs to European political systems and

> models of culture. This occurred not only in settler colonies where the white colonial elite was a direct product of the system, but even in colonies of occupation (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 2000: 63).

My analysis of *Carpentaria* focuses on the interstitial space between parallel narratives within the text that describe the minutiae of the daily lives of the Pricklebush community and the larger critique that the narrator deploys by foregrounding the importance of Aboriginal traditions and knowledge of the land. If, as Bhabha suggests, the "postcolonial perspective" could be enabled to critique "holistic forms of social explanation," then, I choose to focus on the "cusp" of "often opposed political spheres" in my reading of *Carpentaria* (Bhabha 173). In doing so, I wish to critique the "symbols" of a reality that pervades Desperance and the many "eccentricities" that we see in this community in order to examine Wright's interpretation of decolonization.

The invocation of the ancestral serpent, the primacy of the land in communal life, the debilitating effects of mining on Aboriginal land, and the mapping out of scientific knowledge of land that is encoded in Aboriginal storytelling traditions, suggest a challenge being offered to "Australia". However, this juxtaposition of plenitude of Aboriginal traditions and socio-cultural aspects against the depravity suffered by each member of the community in the story provides a trenchant critique that cannot be fully appreciated in terms of "common themes" that are already in the text because it is telling of a larger debate. It is, as I see it, a question of being able to imagine a future by considering Aboriginal traditions of the past in relation to the present in which mining companies have ruined the traditional land and have left the Pricklebush community impoverished, and at the mercy of Uptown bureaucrats. However, one needs to ask at this point if this "future" is similarly constructed in relation to a time that is to come or is

it alternatively imagined in *Carpentaria*? Going by the traditional definition of "decolonization," Wright's narrative does show the process of "revealing" and "dismantling" colonial powers in different forms. However, as we see, this enterprise of revelation of the workings of the colonial power in daily lives of the Aboriginal community, even when marked with a mock-epical humour, besides offering a critique for the present, aspire to (re)imagine the future as well.

> The uneven relations between everyday life and decision-making practices, legislated changes in the governance, or transformations in economic structures – for indigenous women, youth, and children especially demand a language that shifts to the mircopolitical shifts in daily living, thus making it possible to chart the responses, reactions, resistances that take place in relation to legally and socially sanctioned laws. [...] It is my contention that the question of the disconnection between the great humanist values promulgated by the liberal mainstream of European society and its imperial enterprise, must be addressed by examining the ways in which *everyday life*, home and household, became key representational spaces precisely for the purpose of mediating contradictions of imperial violence and benevolent paternalism of regulatory and apparently non-coercive techniques of colonial rule (Emberley 21-23).

Thus, I will suggest that by closely examining the social reality of the small town of Desperance in her novel, Wright reveals the nature of systemic violence and oppression suffered by the aboriginal people since colonization. But the "socio-political" in *Carpentaria* is not what we receive as facts that are "out there" but a narrated rearticulation and a reworking of those bits and pieces of life as lived that we learn through the communal practices of the Pricklebush. The novel, as we see, in a way, strategically silences the "real facts" that continue to colonize the Pricklebush. It is more focussed in the Aboriginal storytelling traditions which, in turn, speak of "symptoms" (for

lack of a better word) or suggestions of oppression. These include the mining company and the Uptown bureaucrats who are busy legislating laws against the people. It is for this reason that we need to reconsider the materiality that is highlighted in the novel. This materiality, I suggest, "is" Angel Day's dumpyard and Normal Phantom's skill of transforming dead fishes into beautifully coloured artefacts. And, I think, a decolonized future must take into account these interstitial spaces that reveal both oppressive life/living conditions and an alternative engagement with those very living conditions within the space of the fiction. I am, thus, suggesting a cautious examination of these spaces that also reflect self-determination. It is, thus, the "uneven relations" that these interstitial spaces carry that, I think, need to be re-examined.

The narrator reaches out to her past, and she uses Aboriginal stories, creation myths and focuses on the importance of Aboriginal Dreamtime in the life of the community in order to seek a future beyond oppression. Thus the act of telling, narrating, revealing, dismantling, and chronicling the everyday life of the Pricklebush community that we have in the novel, besides having an immediate goal of resistance, also carries a vision of the possibilities for the community. And those possibilities emerge from engaging with the materiality I have identified and an understanding if they reflect Indigenous self-determination to envision a future. This is why the critique in the novel displays a commitment to a decolonized future even when it is actively engaged in unravelling lived experiences under the institutionalized violence of colonialism. The role of the "fearless dreamer" that Wright speaks of in this novel is something that needs to be recuperated and, I maintain, must be read as Wright's notion of a decolonized future.

Angel Day and Normal Phantom are flawed in their own ways. And at the same time, one is compelled to take into consideration factors that shape their "flaws". Thus Normal's "pacifism" and his seeming complicities with the white people, his son's activism and intentions to blow up the mines, need to examined as varied political positions of "resistance" that are already conditioned by power structures, and Wright's novel, as I see it, has more to offer than this narrative of victimization. There is, as we know, a creative aspect to these personalities.

> At the same time, there was no sense in denying the truth staring them in the face because there evidently was some: the great magnanimity given to Angel Day by the haunting spirits residing in the smelly residue, deep down in the gloomy, slime-dripping serpentine caverns of the dump. The ponderous, thinking people among the Pricklebush jumped to her defence, *Who was Normal to say he wanted to live elsewhere, under a log with a bit of rag, worse than a dog?* (*Carpentaria*16)

According to the old people of Pricklebush, Angel Day "was purely magical" and "of no benefit to anyone" (16). Her magic, also described as a "disease," is acquired from making her "life out of living in other people's rubbish". The narrative mimics the communal voice in its description of Angel's seemingly inconsequential and obnoxious habit of collecting anything and everything that has been disposed as "white trash" (16) by the community. As Devlin-Glass notes, she "collects nails, screws and bolts in Heinz bean tins, and performs an indigenous makeover of a statue of the Virgin, in order to capture some of the magical powers of the whitefellas, tragically ends on the slippery slope to death or Redfern, annihilated by booze and prostitution" (84). The text is ambiguous about Angel's rubbish dump and tells us there is something more to this archiving of everything. However, what is "everything" for Angel is, also, "nothing"

from a non-Aboriginal perspective. At the same time, one needs to understand this "everything" in terms of Aboriginal ways of perceiving the (colonized) land and what it means to the community. The clash of perception is evident at the moment we come know that the image of Angel at her dumpyard is further exploited, and the dumpyard does not mark a "culmination" of oppression that can be easily metaphorized. We learn officials from Uptown often come to photograph Angel with the dumpyard in her background and the image is consumed by stereotyping her as an impoverished Aboriginal woman. While she is, indeed, an impoverished Aboriginal woman, and by interpreting dumpyard in a different way I do not want to depoliticize it, her view of the dumpyard, however, is telling of a crucial way in which the land is perceived.[15]

Normal Phantom is said to be opposed to Angel's fondness for roaming around in the "dump". He even abandons her for five years after she chooses the dump over him. Normal keeps his promises and decides to stay by the sea – a place that he is as deeply attached to as Angel is to her dump – for exactly five years. There is a humour in this exchange between the two which is never lost to the reader. We are even told Normal has inherited his father's memory of the sea, and we later come to know that he is deeply attached to the stinking colourless dead fishes. Their temporary separation is not a source of sorrow in the narrative but brings in a verve of familiarity and cyclicality in their lives through an unmistakable tone of humour. The humour critiques the causes of these characters' attachment to certain aspects of their daily existence that identify their oppressive living conditions that seem to nourish them and are also nourished by them.

[15] I will be elaborating on the risks of this engaging with this image later in my chapter.

While Normal and Angel enjoy their time apart as they bond more with that which they deeply care for - the sea and Angel's dump yard - their coming together is also celebrated in the text. "She accused him of coming home smelling like a catfish but that didn't stop child number seven being born: Kevin" (17).

> Steeped with ideas so enormous they could be tracked as chaotic enterprises, matrices of chaos, and suspecting the reason why the light was pulsing, he began to understand that the room was like a pickpocket, robbing people of their memories. Norm accused the room of becoming a hoarder of other people's secrets of the heart. What he saw for the first time that night was as real as anything he had ever seen in his life; it opened his eyes, and from then on, he was able to see other things in the room. As the room matured, Norm saw it was bending inwards, steeped with the weight of holding one miraculous discovery after another. It occurred to him that all truths were being accumulated. Poor truth sucked straight out of the mind of all the unrighteous people who came to admire his handiwork. Sometimes, the room appeared to be absorbed by quietness, as though it was reading its secrets. He continued his work, and paused, when he heard the rustling of a page turning inside the walls (*Carpentaria* 206-207).

Later in the novel we are told about Normal's fish house where he is said to work and "compete with the spirits of who knows what, to make fish from the sea come back to life, to look immortal. [...] Mortality did not belong in this room" (205). Indeed to the "outsider" reader, these sections in the novel (when the focus shifts to the abstract from the oppressive reality) the abstraction becomes momentarily unfamiliar. However, in no way are these aspects of the novel merely descriptions; rather, in their evocation of the visionary/dreaming subject who aspires and imagines, they form an alternative to the rem(a)inder of the Aboriginal experience. We see the rem(a)inder of the Aboriginal experience at the hands of colonialism entering a dialogue with Aboriginal perspectives of a decolonized future, through these art forms, at the margins of the of town of

Desperance. It is, then, by recognizing Normal's skills as an art and defamiliarizing them from their usual context as "redundant" spaces that we can identify a call for an Aboriginal vision of decolonization taking place in the text. As the narrator tells us, "[w]hat he saw for the first time that night was as real as anything as he had ever seen in his life; it opened his eyes, and from then on, he was able to see other things in the room."

Normal's experience inside the fish room and while he works on his mystical craft is also seemingly unrealistic. After hours of hard labour when he had finally painted the fishes and suspended them in "oceans of air" (205), and at the very moment when he would hold in his hands the masterpiece, he felt he did not work at all and denies having created them. He goes to the extent of fabricating stories to spread this conviction that he had done no work on the dead fishes. Normal's labour inside the fishroom gains a mythic appeal within the community and we are told, "Desperance being what it was, a modest place, humble people believed in real facts. Only real facts created perfection. So it was. People were not fools" (205). The notion of "perfection" that Normal's imagination seeks to shape cannot be accessed without its commitment to "real facts," and is also crucial for our analysis of the fish room. At the same time, the "perfection" of imagination that is achieved through this art in the form of a handiwork is indeed a perfection that has more to it than just "real facts". In other words, Aboriginal resistance is embedded in this art form that anticipates a decolonized future through its processes of formation. However, in fearlessly imagining this future from the point of its immediate material context, the so-called "real facts" exceed themselves.

We see in Angel and Normal's instances that an examination of their lives also requires us to defamiliarize the images they create but never depoliticize them. Their stories build up curious images that are, of course, symbolic. However, as we are told only "real facts" can create "perfection," these symbols are, thus, carefully constructed ones in the text. The connection between the two, it seems to me, must not be lost while "real facts" are translated into "perfection". Here lies the task of the interpreter to read these images as necessarily subversive and transforming the text as "documents of reconstellation'' (Spivak 2003: 91). The fish room itself is described in a language that is not only descriptive, replete with images, but also has an interrogative component in its narration - it learns and tells simultaneously. The more the narrator describes this room, the more evident it becomes how a language of interrogation is used to deconstruct a reality in order to foresee what it could entail as a future. The "fearlessness" in Wright's view is also something that the reader - who is invited to interpret along the lines of, what Gabriele Schwab calls, "global interdependency of violence" (Schwab 31) - is accountable for. As Wright says, "Australia desperately needs readers who not only read, but also, are selectively seeking information about our basic fears, and want to read well" (Wright 2007: 16).

To the reader, the fish room gains a seemingly "eerie" quality as Normal labours to breathe life into brilliantly decorated and flamboyantly painted dead fishes. The product of his labour within this all-consuming space of the fish room emerges as fishes that looked like "priceless jewelled ornaments" (209). Normal enters into an emotional struggle with the fish room as it seems to know everybody's secrets and makes those available to Normal. In a way, the fish room must have a central position in relation to

his community before Normal can use his craft to make an artistic interpretation of the "truths" of the community. What is also crucial in this imaginary is that the fish room, which signifies an archive in the "present" time, becomes an active and alive space where the "past" ("truths were being accumulated") and the "future" ("the rustling of a page turning inside the walls.") strangely fuse into one.

> ...whatever Norm did to re-create life in the fish he preserved, it was amazing. His fish looked like priceless jewelled ornaments. Each piece was better than the last. [...] Yet, no matter how masterful he was, he knew the ever-watchful other-worldly spirit had more work to do. It remade the fish more beautiful to the eye, casting a replica of colour through the empty nail holes in the roof... (*Carpentaria* 209).

> It is story telling which can forge links between past and present and help Aboriginal people reclaim a history and come to terms with change and loss. [...] Storytelling – whether in [the] form of fiction, drama or poetry – acts to reclaim alternative positive values and a history not only of oppression but of resistance to it. Both can offer the bases for a positive sense of history and identity which can ground resistance to cultural colonization and racism in the present (Weedon 116).

Chris Weedon's comment that the act of storytelling as forging a link between the past and the present is, thus, helpful for my argument because, it seems to me, just as the past, pre-contact Aboriginal history - idealized and romanticized as it may seem to be at points - in Wright's narrative it is not only invoked to juxtapose the present in the act of storytelling, but done so strategically. The novel begins with "A NATION CHANTS, *BUT WE KNOW YOUR HISTORY ALREADY"* (1). The brief paragraph formatted in upper case serves as a prologue to the epic invocation of the ancestral serpent. The section is also a parody of Noah's white dove with an olive branch. We are told about church bells that seem to call "THE FAITHFUL TO THE TABERNACLE WHERE THE GATES OF HEAVEN WILL OPEN" (1). The rewriting of the Biblical episode, while

also referring to the role of the missionaries, who aimed to "civilize" Aboriginal children by spreading Christianity in late eighteenth century Australia, brings in the sheer incongruence of the two worlds. However, more importantly, it also reveals a curious power of the remembering and retelling narrator. The beckoning church bells soon become a part of the lives of the little black girls. It might be recalled that Wright indicates in her speech that there are several forms of oppression that stimulate fear. And in order to understand fear, and how it hinders one from engaging with processes of decolonization, one needs to historicize power relations in its multiple forms that cause fear. *Carpentaria*, because it is more focussed on the narration of those power relations in a mock-epical tone, trivializes those historical power relations by showing how settler-colonialism in Desperance has created internal factions within the Pricklebush community. The town is divided into Eastside and Westsiders. Thus, as I have noted earlier, the beginning of the novel with the colonial encounter does not suggest that the history of this community only came into being after the Europeans landed in the country. However, histories of violence began with the advent of the encounter, and this is also why the novel needs to begin with the moment it came in contact with its other.

> CALLING INNOCENT LITTLE BLACK GIRLS FROM A DISTANT COMMUNITY WHERE THE WHITE DOVE BEARING AN OLIVE BRANCH NEVER LANDS. LITTLE GIRLS WHO COME BACK HOME AFTER CHURCH ON SUNDAY, WHO LOOK AROUND THEMSELVES AT THE HUMAN FALLOUT AND ANNOUNCE MATTER-OF-FACTLY, *ARMAGEDDON BEGINS HERE* (*Carpentaria* 1).

The violence of separation of the little black girls is quietened but not forgotten in this section. This is not to suggest that their suffering is normalized, or that they are silenced.

On the contrary, the little black girls are seen to accept their life under the church by making a bold statement that their routine lives, under the influence of the church, also marks the beginning of the end of their world. We are even told that they make this statement "MATTER-OF-FACTLY". It is this seemingly unconcerned voice that is of crucial importance here. In this description, we see a fragmented image of the Stolen Generation children or Aboriginal children who were made wards of the state in order to be assimilated. The violence and trauma of this sense of annihilation of Aboriginal cultural identity is, in a way, seen to be negotiated and internalized. However, the internalization of trauma does not necessarily make them the "victims" or their narrator devoid of agency. It is almost as if the story of *Carpentaria* can only proceed after the narrator has acknowledged the presence of a traumatic reality in the lives of these little black girls by accounting for their traumatic past. And, again, it is a trauma that cannot be forgotten in the process of recounting it just as it did not silence the little girls while they experienced it. We know they reacted "matter-of-factly".

It would be useful to look at the traumatic memory of this community as it gets remembered at a later point. One can, thus, fully recognize the impact of trauma and the contexts of remembering in the light of the fact that remembering trauma does not necessarily silence oneself but could be considered as suggestive of an agential act. The trauma that is thus highlighted, in the processes of remembering, evokes the possibilities of being harmed even while it participates in the creative act of telling/narrating this traumatic memory for a (decolonized) future that is not yet present. It is, to go back to Wright's notion of dreaming fearlessly for the future, necessary to remember this trauma to exorcize the fear to move on where one is able to dream fearlessly. Moreover, the

material conditions of oppression work as constant reminders, as remainders, of a communal crisis that needs to be addressed. We need to remember that Wright's narrative is deeply motivated by the notion of transforming itself into what she has referred to in the above-quoted lecture as an "instrument of possibility": a fearless dreamer of the future who needs to be able to negotiate with her past before envisioning possibilities of decolonization.

In this context it would also be useful to consider Andreas Huyssen's comments in relation to the rise of memory narratives. Huyssen primarily refers to the Holocaust, and the methods in which it is remembered within the Adornonean framework of "commodity culture". He suggests that the Holocaust must be recognized and read in relation to the contexts in which the Holocaust is remembered and compared. In effect, Huyssen suggests we must not forget the contexts to which the Holocaust is compared because these contexts are more telling of the "form in which we think of the past" (Huyssen 2003: 4) and the future. According to Huyssen, every act of memory carries a "dimension of betrayal, forgetting, and absence" (4) and that we think of the past "without borders rather than national histories with borders" (4). Also, drawing upon Schwab's argument of reading violent histories in conjunction with one another that I have quoted earlier, I would contend that *Carpentaria* displays an attempt to remember the past for a decolonized future in its own terms. According to Huyssen,

> It has been all too tempting to think of trauma as the hidden core of all memory. After all, both memory and trauma are predicated on the absence of that which is negotiated in memory or in the traumatic symptom. Both are marked by instability, transitoriness and structures of repetition. But to collapse memory into trauma, I think, would unduly

> confine our understanding of memory, marking it exclusively in terms of pain, suffering, and loss. It would deny human agency and lock us into a compulsive repetition. Memory, whether individual or generational, political or public, is always more than the prison house of the past (Huyssen 8).

I would like to use this concept of the remembering subject in analyzing the ways in which characters in *Carpentaria* think of their past. Without dissolving differences that define Aboriginal ways of looking back for the future, I suggest that we could use Huyssen's emphasis on material contexts of acts of remembering to identify what each of these acts of remembering seeks to do within the narrative. Such a notion of remembering would also help us to realize that Wright in her novel is not only speaking of the Pricklebush Aboriginal community and its war with Australia but also of violence in general, and its global affiliations as symbolized by the presence of multinational mining corporations on Aboriginal land that defy the fundamental belief in Aboriginal cultures: the land is on "loan" to man and it must be protected. Wright locates the "uneven relations" between the macropolitical and the local; however, her critique does add something more to these relations. She goes on to mock the community by creating caricatures, like Mozzie Fishman, because of their concerns and complicities that actually sustain a systemic nature of the "status-quo" that she is also interested in critiquing. The clash of concerns within the community is brilliantly portrayed in the section when Elias – a symbol of a "modern refugee" or an "allegorical representation of White invasion and separatist indigenous hope" (Devlin-Glass 2007: 84) – tries to make the Aboriginal people question their reality.

> 'Where hid reality?' Elias asked in the Pricklebush, yet who could say what existed in one ordinary coastal town plonked at the top of the

> nation? Who knows what wars Elias thought he was looking for? What war, which war, in whose mind? Somebody could have said, *Elias, there is no war*. War was somewhere else, something to do with the USA or those foreign countries in Europe, the Middle East or Asia. Yes, all of those kind of things were just passing by, far, far away from the things people would talk about in Desperance (*Carpentaria* 84-85).

In analyzing *Carpentaria*, we need to understand that the act of remembering historical acts of oppression within the space of the narrative is not always done with a look towards the past, but is often, I argue, eager to confront a future. As a result, to perform this act of remembering at the very beginning of the novel becomes all the more significant because not only does it suggest a particular way of going back to the past but it is also situated as a way of looking at the historical events that should not be avoided. And, at the same time, need not be seen as the only structuring aspect of Aboriginal identity.

We encounter the ancestral serpent: "a creature larger than storm clouds, came down from the stars, laden with its own creative enormity. [...] It came down those billions of years ago, to crawl on its heavy belly, all around the wet clay soils in the Gulf of Carpentaria" (1). The serpent, we learn, has been there since time immemorial. However, there is also an anxiety about things that have happened to the land and which, in turn, have violated the presence of the sacred serpent. There is a sense of loss. And there is a sense of hope within the very evocation of this creature that is said to dwell in the deepest recesses of the earth. Wright's description of the creative serpent and its implication for the readers has a foreboding tone to it. Although this imaginary serpent is described in great detail, we know that there is something missing in the very evocation of the serpent.

> The serpent travelled over the marine plains, past the mangrove forests and crawled inland. Then it went back to the sea. [...] When it finished creating the many rivers in its wake, it created one last river, no larger or smaller than the others, a river which offers no apologies for its discontent with people who do not know it. [...] It is all around in the atmosphere and is attached to the lives of the river people like skin (*Carpentaria* 2).

> The shiny covers of these tourist brochures celebrating selected historical sites and museums ought to grab you from across the room at airports, hotels and motels, or from the rack of any tourist or travel centre selling the highlights of mining. You can't even hide the stuff because of its iridescence. But this was not Vaudeville. Wars were fought here. If you had your patch destroyed you'd be screaming too. The serpent's covenant permeates everything, even the little black girls with hair combed back off their faces and bobby-pinned neatly for the church, listening quietly to the nation that claims to know everything except the date its world will end. Then, almost whispering, they shyly ask if the weather has been forecast correctly today (*Carpentaria* 11).

The OED defines the word "chronicle" as "a factual written account of an important or historical events in the order of their occurrence" and as a "fictitious or factual work describing a series of events". It is important to analyze the method in which the notion of a chronicle is put forth in the opening section of the novel. In the back and forth movement between the past and the present there is also a glimpse of the future that could be emerging from this context. The role of a chronicle is also important in this regard because, as Huyssen suggests, memory is "always more than the prison house of the past" (8), especially when acts of remembering are deeply conditioned by its immediate socio-political and material contexts. It is only when we realize that remembrance of the past, which the ancestral serpent suggests, is also done with an eye towards the oppressive condition, or the "debris of reality," that we can imagine the future that this resistance seeks to address in its own terms. Devlin-Glass describes the novel as,

> [L]ess reactive and more proactive in dramatizing indigenous epistemology and knowledge systems. Not that it does in any systematic or any traditional ways, the forms known to anthropology; rather it mobilizes the mythological in order to argue the interconnectedness of the Aboriginal sacred and political and ecological matters (Devlin-Glass 82).

The ancestral serpent is said to be everywhere. Its task was not only to create the land and the rivers but it continues to have a rather fundamental relation to the people who had this land as their own at a certain point in history. Not only is the protean serpent spread across the "atmosphere," but it is connected to the people as their "skin". The town of Desperance has its own dynamics, and they are not simple. There is, we are told, a war going on in the town. This war is not just between the oppressor and the oppressed but also between various factions that have come to be a part of Desperance and their multiple motives. The southern bureaucrats want to rename the town Masterton and the Uptown Europeans oppose this idea. The Pricklebush people want to please the Uptown and this is their only reason to oppose the renaming of the town to Masterton. The Aboriginal communities that we encounter later in the story are also fractured; thus we see the absence of a strong sense of a communal (indigenous) presence in the novel. The Pricklebush is the only community that has some considerable presence in this landscape and we are introduced to several characters that belong to this community.

By suggesting the presence and competing influences of several parallel realities, within the town of Desperance, Wright makes the reader realize that oppression and dispossession function at various levels and that the Aboriginal perception of the reality has distinctive features. The town that no longer belongs to the Aboriginal people is now marketed as a tourist spot by the settler communities who dispossessed the Aboriginal

people. The shiny pamphlets for tourists that boast of Aboriginal sacred sites at this place draw a different picture than what the ancestral serpent's presence in the land suggests. The reader is cautioned that the story may sound like "vaudeville" but one should not assume that because "wars" have been fought here. On the other hand, despite the powerful invocation of the serpent, Wright reminds us that her writing is a "scream" and the reader would do the same if his / her land is taken away. ["If you had your patch destroyed you'd be screaming too" (11).] The idea of a "scream" indeed works very well to be read as a resisting voice. I am also taken by the idea that this scream is equally powerful in the little black girl's unquestioning submission to the dictates of the church. It is equally present in the girl's demeanour of having hair combed back across their faces and "neatly bobby-pinned" for the church while they listen "quietly" to the chants of the nation that claims to know everything about the land that it has come to occupy. And it is pervasive in the perception that is aware of the ignorance in the whispering voice (of the settler figure) that seeks to know if the weather had been correctly forecast and eventually reveals its ecological ignorance of the land it has colonized.

We are soon introduced to Normal, the hero, who is widely recognized in the community. He has a strong connection to his ancestral spirits, the communal past, and these defining qualities make him a leader. The Pricklebush people, we learn, believe in Normal's extraordinary capabilities. We are told "Normal Phantom could grab hold of a river in his mind and live with it as his father's fathers did before him" (6). And it is Normal again who is also recognized by the bureaucrats as the leader of the community. Normal's relationship with the town bureaucrats, and his pacifist stance towards them, are revealed when the narrator criticizes the measures taken by the local government in the

name of "meaningful coexistence" (8). The narrator suggests "coexistence" has only come to create class divisions between Aboriginal communities and further oppression of people who are not involved with the bureaucracy. The name of the river that Normal "symbolizes" was suggested to be changed to "Normal". Such gestures towards "coexistence" are interpreted as superficial, and only meant to exacerbate the tensions that already exist within the community.

We learn that "those Aboriginal people who took the plunge to be councillors wisely used their time for scraps of personal gain for their own families living amidst the muck of third-world poverty" (8). It is a technique of being precisely able to locate the machinations that validate systemic colonization that makes Wright's novel powerfully rooted in the present time as a "scream" that speaks at multiple levels. In this case, how are we to negotiate with these, unacknowledged, in-between spaces from which representations of oppression emerge, and what does the novel accomplish by presenting us with these complex webs of power relations? It is as if Wright refuses to direct her critique against any one party. The contact with the multinational mining corporations is chronicled as a part of an ongoing process that promises to lead to "development" or something like it. The event leads to more troubles for the community; however, the crucial part of this description lies in the fact that it is recorded at the very point it affects the communal life.

> Yes, there was plenty of worry. Worry straight for Uptown. The Council had a string of evening meetings so everyone could come along and have their voice heard. It was like living in a democracy. Paranoia was the word that best described what took place inside the squashed Council chambers. Everyone had a story to tell about some Aboriginals

> who they saw sitting under a tree thinking about lighting fires. Some Aboriginals were seen pushing up into Uptown itself – abandoned car bodies to live in. You could see Aboriginals living in them behind the fences at the end of their backyards even. Aboriginals were thinking about setting up another camp. The net was not working. What was happening to the net? Wasn't the net supposed to be there for the purposes of protecting the town against encroachment from people who were not like themselves? (*Carpentaria* 33-34)

While the impact of economic exploitation of the land, at the hands of multinational mining companies, is revealed systematically throughout the novel, the fact that violence and discrimination are perpetrated at more than one level is also evidenced by revealing a normalization of violent language and thought among other characters in the novel. In other words, Wright forces us to reconsider our assumptions of familiar faces of discrimination by using the metaphor of this imaginary "net" that is supposed to keep all the Aboriginal people away from the privileged Uptown people. In his mayoral speech to the town, Stan Bruiser refers to the Aboriginal people as "coons" (34) and is corrected by someone in the audience in the following words, "'[e]xcuse me, Mr. Bruiser, Mayor, you don't have to talk like that. We are just saying that they are an eyesore, so what are you going to do about it?'" (34) The more the mining companies come to exploit the town, the more urgent it becomes for the town council to resurrect the need for the imaginary (which was already there) "net" against the Aboriginal community during their farcical town council meetings. The fact that dispossession of land and exclusion from citizenship work simultaneously becomes clear in the town council meeting when some Aboriginal people, we are told, were rumoured to be "pushing up into Uptown" and violating the "net" after their land is taken away.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to go back to Wright's lecture where she discusses the notion of non-Indigenous thought as one that attempts to spread out, one that projects and imposes itself outwards, one that has a "linear sensibility" (6) in contrast to Indigenous thought that is "stationery" and always in relation to the land. Wright refers to Edouard Glissant's *Poetics of Relation* (1997) and describes Indigenous thought in Glissant's terms, "an 'epic' voice, of being and belonging to one place, while sitting stationery in the 'whorls' of time'" (Wright 7). She criticizes the colonial hubris encoded in non-Indigenous thought as one that "operates through the prism of an egotistic projectile imagination which has a linear sensibility towards invasion, suppression, and always changing laws" (6). She says, "[o]ur people say our law is constant and understandable but white law always changes" (7). According to Wright's description of Indigenous thought, it can be said that it is holistic and that the sense of time in Indigenous thought is not only not linear but also coalesced into having an organic connection that is perhaps inconceivable to the non-Indigenous reader. However, it tells us that the future of the Aboriginal community through Indigenous Self-Determination cannot be what the present is not. In other words, the present reality, oppressive, unfamiliar and fearful as it may be, has to be considered and acknowledged before one can think about the future. In the heart of despair and oppression, Wright's narrator tells us that the very land that had been taken away from the Pricklebush people by mining companies was also the place where members of the community saw other things that were not visible to the settlers.

> In these times it was assumed that any outsider to these dreams would never see the stones of Desperance, if he carried a different understanding of worldly matters originating from ancient times elsewhere. The outsider to these dreams saw only open spaces and flat

> lands. The Pricklebush mob saw huge, powerful, ancestral creation spirits occupying the land and sea moving through the town, even inside other folk's houses, right across any piece of the country (*Carpentaria* 59).

There is a clash of "world views" in sections such as these (Kolig 1989: 89). It is a clash between Aboriginal and European ways of perceiving realities. There is also a clash of the different conceptions of time in the two cultures. While there is a "linear" view of time in the settler community, the Pricklebush conception of time takes into consideration a model of time in which the future is not out there to be known and encountered but one that emanates from the everyday reality; one that is deeply conditioned by the interaction of experience in present time and the knowledge gained from the past, from the elders of the community, and from the traditional stories. In order to have a future where one can dream fearlessly, Wright urges her readers to understand the need to dream and imagine without constraints in the present time. The Aboriginal concept of Dreamtime is crucial for understanding how it pertains to the everyday life of the community. Dreamtime, as Kolig and Havecker suggest, does not merely refer to a remote period, when according to Aboriginal mythology the ancestral spirits created the universe, it also includes the processes in which everyday experiences are incorporated in the communal memory through stories, songs, and narratives as communal knowledge. The recurrent juxtaposition of the Aboriginal past in the post-contact present in *Carpentaria,* and the use of a traditional perception of the land to describe it in the narrative present, have an adaptive component to it. This juxtaposition shows the ways in which a colonized culture attempts to survive while also attempting to adapt to the changes that are brought about. In doing so, it also perpetuates the Aboriginal doctrine of knowledge through experience.

The decolonized future in *Carpentaria* is, thus, envisioned by portraying Aboriginal perceptions of land, objects, and organisms, such as Normal's fishes and Angel's dumpyard, as moments of spontaneous imagination within the text that do not cease to relate to the community even in the face of adversity. In a way, these spaces, I suggest, can be understood as those inhabited by powerful realities that could be metaphorized productively; however, they must be read by considering both the past (history) of the Pricklebush community and the future that is envisioned on Indigenous terms. It is so because the "onus" as Eigenbrod writes (71) – referring to Lee Maracle's response that onus to "undo" the "dilemma" caused by colonialism (Maracle 1993: 168) – lies with the reader. While it is easy to define Normal's passion for decorating dead fishes and Angel's obsession with her dumpyard in terms of the "artistic excellence" of an Aboriginal *bricoleur*, and their objects of creativity as a *bricolage*[16], it is also highly problematic to interpret these acts as wholly celebratory gestures and erase the material conditions of oppression from which they emerge. Stephen Muecke defines bricolage, in this context, as, "the activity of roaming in the ruins of a culture, picking up useful bits and pieces to keep things going or even make them function better. It can even be seen as subversive of the dominant culture" (Muecke 1984: 148). Muecke notes,

> A celebration of the adaptive practices like *bricolage* should not detract from the fact that, as a class, these people have always suffered the highest rate of unemployment, the worst health, and the most inadequate living conditions since the arrival of European settlers in Australia turned

[16] According to Stephen Muecke "Aboriginal *bricoleurs,* often through necessity, use barbed wire as clothes lines; forty-four gallon drums three-quarters full of sand make excellent fire places, and kerosene is a most efficient way of starting up a fire, [...] *Bricolage* as a way of life is flexible and adaptive and it is present in all cultures. It can even be seen as subversive of the dominant culture" (Muecke 148-49).

> survival strategies completely around. From that moment, survival for Aboriginal people has been *forced* into the no-man's-land of *bricolage* (Muecke 149).

In this case, a distinction is crucial in order to understand the future that is suggested in the figure of the Aboriginal *bricoleur* in Wright's novel. The distinction that is to be made is between the figure that this Aboriginal *bricoleur* constructs, as we see in the characters of Angel and Normal, and a "responsible" interpretation of it. The distinction is, then, that of the role of the *bricoleur* as a figure of a decolonized future through "Indigenous Self-Defined Dream," as opposed to it being problematically suggestive of a moment of celebration of "artistic achievement" in denial of its formative processes. It is only when this distinction is retained in the reader's imagination of the future that the metaphor of *bricolage* in this context will carry a "responsible literality'' (Spivak 2003: 72).

Wright's use of the creative serpent seems to me as telling of the way the concept of a *bricoleur,* as indicative of a decolonized future through Indigenous Self-Determination, could be understood in *Carpentaria.* The creative serpent is both in the atmosphere, in the deepest cores of the earth under the river and attached to the lives of the river people like their "skin" (2). In effect, the creative serpent is both mythical and a lived reality for the community. It is everywhere and, at the same time, nowhere. We can see echoes of the text's description of Angel's dumpyard which is both "everything" and "nothing," depending on who is viewing the dumpyard. Similarly, the creative serpent can be seen and perceived by the Pricklebush people and cannot even be imagined by the European settlers. Could the *bricolage* that we see in Normal's and Angel's crafts, then, be both rooted in their everyday lives as remainders of their experiences and

negotiations with the colonial encounter that remind us of a decolonization of the future through the imagination is also a possibility?

{Chapter Three}

Mahasweta and the Dual Strategy

> Mahasweta Devi lingers in postcoloniality in the space of difference, in decolonized terrain... Especially in critique of a metropolitan culture, the event of political independence can be automatically assumed to stand between colony and decolonization as an unexamined good that operates a reversal. But the political goals of the new nation supposedly are determined by a regulative logic derived from the old colony, with its interest reversed... Whatever the fate of this supposition, it must be admitted that there is always a space that cannot share in the energy of this reversal. This space has no established agency of traffic with the culture of imperialism.
>
> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. "Women in Difference" (1993: 77-78)

In this chapter, I focus on specific aspects of Mahasweta's stories – "Shishu" (1993), "Douloti the Bountiful" and "The Hunt" (1995). My discussion of these stories attempts to tease out the meanings and implications of this "space of difference" (Spivak 1993: 77) that decolonization creates outside the "culture of imperialism," i.e. the metropolitan spaces within the decolonized terrain. While my understanding of this space is influenced by Spivak's formulations, I suggest, as narratives of spaces that cannot be read as only speaking of that which has been expended "for decolonization," these stories access lives and realities in this "space of difference" while also staging their literary value in the process. Mahasweta's strategies are necessarily dual and reciprocal as, by upholding subaltern realities and intervening, she fictionalizes a reality and also realizes her fiction. Distinctions between the "culture of imperialism" and Aboriginal India are put into a

urgent, and often violent, dialogue in these stories as they offer multiple ways of understanding Aboriginal / tribal spaces within the "decolonizing terrain" and it is through these dialogues, I argue, she brings in a distinct literariness in her writings as well. The very moment these narratives reveal structures and processes that aim to constitute the "political goals of the new nation," (Spivak 1993: 78) which, in turn, oppress spaces inhabited by Aboriginal peoples and subaltern groups, is also a moment of reconsideration of these stories.

Let me explain this point with instances from the ending of "The Hunt". Mary kills the Tehsildar – the exploitative contractor who attempts to sexually exploit Mary – and the scene of his death is depicted in curiously symbolic terms. We learn that for Mary the act of killing the Tehsildar was deeply fulfilling. Mahasweta compares her "deep satisfaction" as "if she has been infinitely satisfied in a sexual embrace" ("The Hunt" 17). And Mary, after washing the blood off her body, joins the women's celebration of the Jani Parab: a festival that comes after every twelve years when the women take their "turn" (12) in organizing the annual feast after a spirited game of hunting in the forest. The story tells us, "[l]ike the men they too go out with bow and arrow" (12). Mary's return to her community, which has gathered for a feast organized by women, after killing the Tehsildar, is symbolic. After the kill, Mary's participation is described as one who "drank the most wine, sang, danced, ate the meat and rice with greatest relish" (17). Budhni, another woman who also participates in the festivity, says, "[l]ook how she's eating? As if she has made the biggest kill" (17). Mahasweta's focus on Mary as the "hunter," or Mary's celebration of the Jani Parab, then, becomes as crucial for us to consider as her identity as an Aboriginal (of mixed descent) woman outside the

periphery of the strictly caste-and-class demarcated Hindu society, i.e. as "the hunted". However, we cannot ignore that Mary, as the female subaltern, can only become the "hunter" in Mahasweta's fiction as a symbol: one whose value must be recuperated and could be productively metaphorized as a comment on oppressive structures in general. Here lies a crucial technique in Mahasweta's fiction of speaking about ("local") events within a larger matrix of critique.

> Mary laughed and held him, laid him on the ground. Tehsildar is laughing, Mary lifts the machete, lowers it, lifts, lowers. A few million moons pass. Mary stands up. Blood? On her clothes? She'll wash in the cut. With great deftness she takes the wallet from Tehsildar's pocket ("The Hunt" 16-17).

Gayatri Spivak, in her essay "Planetarity," writes, "[a]nd to learn to read is to learn to dis-figure the undecidable figure into a responsible literality, again and again" (Spivak 2003: 72). While I will be referring to "Planetarity," and how it could be deployed to understand moments such as these, in greater detail, in my conclusion, I want to emphasize the "undecidable figure" that Mary reflects while she engages in a seemingly bacchic frenzy at the festival after killing the Tehsildar. To metaphorize the implications of the "hunter" and the "hunted" in relation to Mary Oraon, then, seems to me, to be a "responsible" way in which we one can respond to and, simultaneously, be responsible for – on the lines of a critical "response-ability" (Eigenbrod 70) – the literary value of Mahasweta's writing that "engages" and also always calls for a social responsibility. However, the "logic of the metaphor" (Spivak 2003: 71) must be absolutely explicit.

We know "[t]he text (text-ile as the weave of work) is in the field of activism, e-laborated in labor" (Spivak 1995: 201) and, thus, can never fully "supplement" (201) that

which it seeks to combat. At the same time, as Spivak suggests, this moment in "The Hunt" marks a moment of (symbolic) "supplementation" as well. This moment when it is responsibly metaphorized seeks "to change laws, modes of production, systems of education and health care" (201) for Mary the "hunted". To speak in terms of this metaphor-making process in the text, Mary, the "hunter," in her metaphorized self, reveals a "responsible literality" of her "hunted" self. It is, thus, this process of translation, or one that makes a metaphor at a nuanced moment in the text, that I am interested in, in this discussion of Mahasweta's fiction. Her fiction, as we will see in "The Hunt" and "Douloti," is not about a tribal identity in relation to any indentitarian understanding of Aboriginality. It is about tribal identity or Aboriginality "as such" in the context of these two stories (Spivak 1993: 78).

This "as such," is used by Spivak in relation to "decolonization," and as practised in this "space of difference" against Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities is telling of a state of systemic paralysis that Mahasweta critiques. In doing so, however, Mahasweta's writing, as we see in "The Hunt" and "Douloti," indigenizes the "space" that marks the failure of decolonization. She does so not just by bringing together non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal communities in a different ways but by carefully deploying her journalistic technique of narration that focuses more on this transformed "space," which is seen to be affecting tribal and non-tribal communities alike. We see significant differences in the portrayal of tribal identity in these stories which can only be compared to "Shishu" and *PT* after the differences have been fully mapped out.

The "as such" is also important for our understanding because we have in it a complex mediation of realities in fiction in which tribal identity and Aboriginal India are refracted to portray the lived experiences of a female subaltern, such as Mary Oraon, outside the "culture of imperialism," as perceived by the "engaged" writer who does "not" belong to Mary's community. And, at the same time, it is this "as such" variant of decolonization that exploits tribal women, like Mary and Douloti, as unpaid labourers and sex-workers. Thus, it would be useful to point out the processes in which Aboriginality "as such" is affected by "decolonization," and how Mahasweta's fiction takes these processes into consideration even while it does "not" seem to speak about Aboriginal India as we had seen in the case of *PT.*

In "Douloti," while describing the money lender Munabar Singh Chandela's "way" of "transforming" free men and women of several tribal and non-tribal communities into *kamiyas,* or "bonded" as unpaid labour, Mahasweta writes,

> When did the Rajput brahman from outside come to this land of jungle and mountain? When did all the land slide into his hands? Then cheap field labor became necessary. That was the beginning of making slaves on hire purchase. [...] He keeps Dusad, Ghasi, Nagesia, Munda, Lohar, Oraon, Bhuyian, Chamar, Parhaia as kamiya. There is no end to people he has lent money to and made into kamiyas. By what strength? Where is his strength? ("Douloti" 21)

And Douloti's father, Ganori Nagesia, is described as,

> [h]e is a Nagesia by birth, their community is small. In Palamu, the communities of Nagesias and Parhaias are small. The bigger communities are Bhuyians, Dusads, Dhobis, Ganjus, Oraons, Mundas. The village is called Seora. Its owner is Munabar Singh, a Rajput Chandela ("Douloti" 20).

We have in these instances in the text a dual strategy being enacted. The technique of naming communities at these moments in the story, according to Spivak, leads to inscription of "space[s] of active displacement of the Empire-Nation or colonialism-decolonization reversal" (Spivak 1993: 79). I suggest it also brings forth Mahasweta's journalistic style at its best, and that it is performed for a definite purpose. The purpose is, of course, to show this "space of active displacement," and "also" to locate the failure of "decolonization *as such,*" (78) at its most brutal moments of transformation and reinscription by "bonding" several communities for unpaid labour for a lifetime. While this journalistic approach shows what the writer's perception of these communities is, (by fusing the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities into one group that is "*kamiya*") it also does not fail to reveal that Munabar Chandela's method of transforming this "space" is, actually, based upon a rather necessary monolithizing enterprise that can, perhaps, only be suggested and duplicated from the writer/journalist's "outsider" point of view. The point of equating Munabar's method with the writer's technique is not to align this technique with Munabar's colonizing mission but to suggest that in this space the identitarian distinction[17] between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities, as we witness particularly in these stories, does "not" make a difference. At this point, we may recall Benjamin Baer's comment that locates the problems of precisely defining Aboriginal India in indentitarian term because Hinduism – as the dominant religion – has

[17] My understanding of the "distinction" between tribal and non-tribal groups as mentioned in this quotation derives from Mahasweta Devi's interview with Gayatri Spivak titled: "'Telling History' – Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak interviews Mahasweta Devi" (Devi 2003: ix-xxiii). In this interview, Mahasweta refers to several of these communities. Some of them, such as the Mundas, are said to be "tribals," and are referred to as "the first comer in the Indian tribal society" (xiii). She also refers to the "so-called lower castes" such as the "Dusads, Ganjus, Chamars" (xiii).

also largely colonized the Aboriginal world. In "The Hunt" and "Douloti," Mahasweta reveals this problem too. Thus the rhetorical questions and the incantatory answers provided along with those ("[w]hen did all the land slide into his hands? [..] That was the beginning of making slaves on hire purchase.") are crucial for us to understand that the moment the "Rajput brahman" conquered tribal and forested areas, he also affected the tribal and non-tribal communities living in the area in non-economic ways.

It is, perhaps, for this reason that Mahasweta strongly advocates subaltern alliances of tribal and non-tribal communities in the context of this India. As she says, "solidarity is resistance" (Devi 2003: xv). This is why in the contexts of "The Hunt" and "Douloti" we need to understand Aboriginality as it is seen to be victimized by decolonization in a different way than we see it in "Shishu" and *PT*. Here, I think it would also be useful to note that in "The Hunt" and "Douloti" we see Aboriginality "as such"; however, in case of the latter two stories, we see Aboriginal India as "imagined" and as also directly "experienced"[18] by the narrators. There is a different kind of literariness in *PT* and "Shishu". In examining the former two stories, thus, I will take into account aspects that "transform" this Aboriginality, and, as we will see, render "The Hunt" and "Douloti" stories that are more about Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities in the "space of difference" (as witness from an "outside") and highlights this difference as well.

[18] In "Telling History," Mahasweta says, "*Pterodactyl* is the crux of my tribal experience. I do not seem them as defeated and crushed" (Devi 2003: xiv).

While Mary as the hunted figure provides the basis of Mahasweta's narrative, her journalistic verve as evidenced in "Douloti," and her concentration on the minutiae of exploitation as examined through everyday realities, also needs to be examined within the economy of fiction in order to be realized as always, and necessarily, meaning something more. I will move on with my analysis of Mary, and some other characters, as the "hunted" first, and look at the *facts* that build Mahasweta's fiction. However, as I insist on understanding her stories in their fictional terms as well, I will end this part of the discussion with a quotation from Spivak that captures my concerns regarding analysis of Aboriginal literatures in general.

> All around us is the clamor for the rational destruction of the figure, the demand for not clarity but immediate comprehensibility by the ideological average. This destroys the force of literature as a cultural good (Spivak 2003: 71).

It is useful to remember the criticism of "immediate comprehensibility" (71) when examining the symbolic or literary value of Mahasweta's writing because it is by distinguishing between "immediate comprehensibility" and "clarity" that one may engage with the symbolic and "planetary" thought encoded in the figure of Mary as the "hunter". To metaphorize, then, in the case of my texts, as I have done in my analysis of *Carpentaria*, is not to lose sight of the "real" but to engage with the same reality in a way that resists "immediate comprehensibility" even though the socio-economic "causes" and "effects" that condition Aboriginal communities may be all too familiar for the reader. Thus, I also wish to move beyond, but not lose sight of the social and economic conditions of Aboriginal India by restoring the literary value in Mahasweta's fiction.

The system of bonded labour that Mahasweta refers to in "Douloti" and "The Hunt" emerges from a cycle of exploitation. The cycle, as it were, includes small-scale land owners who no longer find cultivation profitable because of their indebtedness. Mary Oraon's "revenge," in a way, looks back at this system. The creation of these symbolic meanings is, indeed, a process in Mahasweta's narrative, and I will focus on this later in the chapter. If exposure of the dynamics of exploitation is a process, then, one must begin with the facts that this fiction draws upon. Systemic exploitation, as we see in these stories, is sustained by a number of factors. N. N. Vyas suggests that the debt and financial dependency created due to excruciating interest rates and lack of literacy among communities (in order to be able to challenge the moneylenders) offer a fertile ground for establishment of this system. Vyas refers to exploitation "as a sociological concept" in non-urban India (Vyas 1980: 1) and distinguishes between tribal and non-tribal communities in India to suggest that the coercive aspect of exploitation is not aimed at Aboriginal communities only. Instead, exploitation creates the basic foundation of oppressive conditions that, in turn, manages to affect subaltern groups (both tribal and non-tribal or "caste-Hindus") uniformly (Vyas 1980: 23). According to Vyas,

> [I]ndebtedness acts as a vital force in transforming a landowning cultivator into a landless labourer. The fact is also meaningful, here in further explaining the process by which cultivators with very small land-holders and the landless labourers get bonded to the big landowners and moneylenders. Needless to emphasise that agriculture, as an occupation, does not help cultivators with small holdings to rise above the subsistence level. For need-fulfillment they have to turn to the moneylender. The case of landless labourers in even worse. They always remain in a state of want. This leads to all kinds of exploitation (Vyas 84).

In this explanation we can easily see how "capitalist development" (Spivak 1993: 77-78) is connected with the hindrances in processes of a decolonization that, perhaps, envisioned a future without bonded labour. The notion of "development" that Mahasweta locates as opposing the decolonization is a development that benefits a section of the society while things remain unchanged for communities who are exploited and "bonded" as labourers. In Mary Oraon's story, for instance, it is the Tehsildar who recruits labourers from tribal areas and later attempts to molest Mary. If the "state of want" is an implication of the subalternity of those who are perpetually in that state, it is also symptomatic of the status quo that both Mahasweta and Wright (in her speech – "The Question of Fear" – that I have analyzed in the earlier chapter) identify and critique through their fiction. It is also to be remembered that there is a suggestion in both the authors that "decolonization" has come to mean economic development, in a narrow sense, for a particular section only, and always caters to, and is formed by, the "culture of imperialism" – roughly that which is outside the Aboriginal world. In this context, the juxtaposition and the exploitative interactions between the two worlds may be understood in the way Mahasweta explains the isolation of Aboriginal communities in India in her interview with Spivak.

> These people do not find anyone writing about them, and they do not have script. They compose the stream of events into song. By being made into song, into words, they become something... a continuity. Their history is like a big flowing river going somewhere, not without a destination. Not without. [...] I wrote in *Pterodactyl* that the tribal world is like a continent handed over to us, and we never tried to explore it, know its mysteries, we only destroyed it. It's very difficult to reknit that entire experience without knowing what their potentiality was, how much they had to give. We did not respect them (Devi 2003: x).

Decolonization as the "goal of the new nation" in these stories emerges as a distorted image of colonization itself. As we learn from Spivak, it works in "reversal" and happens to be deeply conditioned by the various factors that are derived from the "old colony" (Spivak 1993: 77-8). Spivak enumerates these goals as "secularism, democracy, socialism, national identity and capitalist development" (78). The logic of capitalist development and how it could affect marginalized communities can be understood through the instance of rapid industrialization in India after Independence. However, in the case of Mahasweta's fiction it is necessary to understand exactly how initiatives of development by the Indian government have worked against *Adivasi* communities in particular. With reference to Mahasweta's stories, Gabrielle Collu suggests,

> [t]he post independence thirst for rapid development and industrialization of India, accompanied by huge public investments in development projects such as the Bhakra-Nangal Dam in Punjab, the Tungabhadra project in Andhra Pradesh, the Hirakud dam in Orissa, the Rihand dam in Uttar Pradesh, and more recently, the Narmada Dam project displaced millions of people from their land without offering them adequate compensation, drowned forests and arable land, and contributed to the growing gap between the rich and the poor and the pauperization of the adivasis. The exploitation of mines and the growing paper industry have also played their role in the disenfranchisement of the tribal people and in growing deforestation (Collu 48).

It is also crucial for this analysis to emphasize that the space inhabited by the tribal people of India has always been systematically left out of the grand narrative of decolonization and nationalism of the nation-state. Thus Mahasweta's turn to documentation of histories of Aboriginal groups in her fiction in the 1970s, particularly *because* she is not an Aboriginal person, requires some attention in relation to the "post independence thirst for rapid development" (Collu 48) and the massacres of nationalism that were experienced

during the period in India. The need for documenting histories and presence of Aboriginal peoples and subaltern groups in general, and in Mahasweta's case, when placed in its temporal context, shows us the need for not just "speaking for" these peoples but a concomitant need to challenge historiography because of its complicities with the nation-state. As Dipesh Chakrabarty notes,

> [t]he persistence of religious and caste conflict in postindependence India, the war between India and China in 1962 which made official nationalism sound hollow and eventually gave rise to a fascination with Maoism among the urban educated youth in India, the outbreak of violent Maoist political movement in India (known as Naxalite movement) which drew many members of the urban youth into the countryside in the late 1960s and early 1970s – all these and many other factors combined to alienate younger historians from the shibboleths of nationalist historiography (Chakrabarty 2000: 14).

The metaphor of the "relay race" (Spivak 1993: 78) between "Empire" and "Nation" is vital because it suggests the derivative logic of development that the newly independent nation receives from the Empire. The omission of this space marked by exploitation of Aboriginal peoples reflects contemporary instances of neo-colonialism that Mahasweta's stories inform through interventions and graphic detailing of systemic oppression. Her stories arrest moments and contexts in postindependent India where the character Singh, from "Shishu," and her readers encounter different ways in which decolonization is practised against tribal peoples. The non-tribal subjects in Mahasweta's narratives – the "ordinary Indian" ("Shishu" 250) Singh: the well-meaning relief officer – represent the "culture of imperialism" and are shown as developing characters who reveal more of themselves in the course of the stories.

Diana Brydon interprets postcolonialism as "a locally situated attempt to think through the consequences of colonialism... [It] is neither a thing nor an essentialized state; rather, it is a complex of processes designed to circumvent imperial and colonial habits of the mind" (Brydon 173-74). In effect, Brydon argues for a practice of postcolonialism where the concept is not a readily available effect of political independence, and, in fact, has little to do with this event itself. It is so because for the postcolonial subject, in this case Mahasweta's mostly academic readers, it is an always provisional method of "unlearning" (*IM* 200) the "colonial habits of the mind" that makes him/her come to terms with the stories. In the event of reading Mahasweta's interventionist writing that deals with the "local," unheard, obscure, erased, and forgotten aspects of the "unproduced" and "undifferentiated mass" called "India" (Spivak 1993: 78) and its tribal people, I think the phrase "colonial habits of the mind" needs to be understood as a capacious category. Factors such as caste, class, the system of bonded labour, slavery, and traffic in Aboriginal / *adivasi* women that Mahasweta's stories talk about, all come to play in this category that deals with the so-called "habits of the mind" - a habit, an assumption, a condition, state-of-affairs, or what Spivak calls the varied effects of an "unexamined good" (77). Mahasweta's stories show us ways to critique an unproblematized narrative of decolonization, its assumptions as practised by the homogenising forces of the nation-state and globalization by tracing the ways in which the ex-colonial subject can become a "postcolonial" one only through a "persistent critique of what one must inhabit" (Spivak 1993: 61). Sankaran Krishna's explanation of this crucial Spivakian aphorism (which I have analyzed at length in my first chapter) is as follows:

> For Spivak, postcoloniality is a condition that recognises the privilege of being conversant with the culture of imperialism, knows it as an instance of one's own colonization, and yet cannot disown it: "This impossible 'no' to a structure, which one critiques, yet inhabits intimately, is the deconstructive philosophical position, and the everyday here and now named 'post-coloniality' is a case of it" (Spivak 1993: 60). Colonial modernity, then, is the vexed inheritance of the postcolonial: it is a structure that according to Spivak's circumlocution, one cannot not want to inhabit (Krishna 2009: 99).

If the "everyday here and now named 'post-coloniality'" is an instance that suggests the commitments of the "deconstructive philosophical position" of the "one," i.e. Mahasweta's reader or the postcolonial critic, then, I argue, there is indeed a possibility of revitalizing decolonization by putting this perspective of postcoloniality in dialogue with Mahasweta's stories; particularly, moments of production and repercussions of symbolic images of violence, and the subject positions of protagonists such as Puran and Singh because they tell us how these symbolic moments are formed. At the same time, the *everyday here and now*[19] contains the effects and narratives of the "habits of the mind" of those who participate in the "everyday," and this, as Mahasweta's stories seem to suggest, must be interrogated along with multiple realities[20] that contest the philosophical

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[19] Here I am also referring to Julia Emberley's argument in her introduction to *Defamiliarizing the Aboriginal: Cultural Practices and Decolonization in Canada* (2007) where she suggests decolonization needs to be examined in relation to everyday lives of Aboriginal communities (Emberley 21-23). I have analyzed this argument in greater detail in the previous chapter in relation to Wright's *Carpentaria*.

[20] In relation to the 'multiple realities' that form and accentuate the need for the symbolic, I will be analyzing Arif Dirlik's formulations on "place consciousness" (Dirlik 2001: 16). Dirlik's formulations seem useful to me in understanding certain aspects of these stories; however, Dirlik's method, as we will see, only allows him to address the binaries of 'local' and the 'global' and, thus, does not help me in understanding the politics of meaning-making in Mahasweta's narrative. Mahasweta's characters, such as Puran and Singh, or her heroine Mary Oraon as the

constructs, commitments and aspirations of Spivak's "postcoloniality". For instance, Ella Shohat and Linda Smith's (Smith 24) arguments that colonialism is still present and alive for Aboriginal communities must be seen as productively bringing to crisis those very commitments and not dismissed. Shohat writes,

> The term 'post-colonial' carries with it that colonialism is now a matter of past, undermining colonialism's economic, political, and cultural deformative-traces in the present.... The 'post-colonial' leaves no space, finally for the struggles of aboriginals of Australia and indigenous peoples throughout the Americas, in other words, of Fourth World peoples dominated by both First World multi-national corporations and by Third World nation-states (Shohat 326-27).

'hunter', portray a nuanced understanding of the value of the symbolic, and it is here I find Spivak's invocation of the 'planetary' useful and compelling.

Places, as Dirlik tells us, get to be considered and rethought only at the moment of their extinction. Since "globality," Dirlik suggests, is the underlying condition of all places, places are only looked at when the 'global' is about to appropriate the place within its own structures. Places, in the face of this extinction, needs to be recovered because according to Dirlik places provide us with newer ways of thinking about "politics" and "production of knowledge" and the conditions under which such knowledge is produced. Dirlik writes -

> I will suggest... that it may be best to conceive of places and place-based consciousness not as a legacy of history or geography, the given of time and space that provide the context for intellectual and political activity, *but as projects that are devoted to the creation and constructions of new contexts for thinking about politics and production of knowledge*. I argue that changes in attitude on questions of development, social categories, and culture, under conditions of global capitalism, are largely responsible for contemporary manifestation of place-consciousness. The later, in turn, opens up new avenues for the ways in which we think about these questions. At the same time of intellectual uncertainty and political despair, moreover, place consciousness offers a critical perspective from which to reevaluate long standing assumptions in social and political analysis to formulate alternatives both to the hegemony of an abstract modernity and the political defeatism if not nihilism of a ludic post-modernity (Dirlik 2001: 16, emphasis added).

Thus, I maintain, there are a few things to be a gained by reading these arguments alongside Mahasweta's narratives of Aboriginal India. While colonialism is certainly not a thing of the past for Aboriginal peoples in Australia and "Fourth World peoples dominated by both First World multi-national corporations and by Third World nation-states," the "postcolonial" as a "concept-metaphor" could be deployed to critique this (de)colonization and analyze its "as such" (78) representations in Mahasweta's stories. Shohat and Smith's charge serves as useful reminder that can guide our understanding of "postcolonial" subjects such as Mahasweta the author, her readers, and some of her characters.

Later in this chapter I will explore the notion of decolonization, which is not a continuously working process that takes into account the entire nation along with the "local" but more of a condition of oppression, or state-of-affairs, that is differently pervasive across the nation-state in Mahasweta's narrative. Decolonization in this "space" is not a continually engaging process, it is a state-of-affairs, "status quo" (the way Wright uses it in "The Question of Fear") that simply exists, imposed on this space, and follows an order of its own. The perpetrators, in this enterprise of "decolonization," as Mahasweta's stories suggest, have come to occupy the position of the colonizer because this "decolonization" necessitates a reversal of roles; an aspect that is clearly not acknowledged or realized in its fullest extent by two parties: the mostly non-tribal characters in the stories (including the well-meaning relief officer in S: Singh) who perpetuate this condition and the reader whose complicity in silencing these tribal communities is not allowed to be ignored.

In an article, "Year of the Birth – 1871" (2002), Mahasweta writes,

> Such people were notified, who, according to the British, were nomadic cattle grazers, wandering singers, acrobats, etc. Also, those who resisted the British aggression from time to time. The logic was simple. These people lived in forests, or were nomads. [...] As Indians follow caste professions, these mysterious (to the British) people too are hereditary criminals. Thus history's most heinous crime was perpetuated in this Act.

Mahasweta's interventionist writing takes up precisely this "legacy" of the caste system and the colonial law[21], reminding her readers the paradoxes of decolonization and vastly different subject positions that caste, gender, class and systems of oppression (such as bonded labour) can create within a "decolonizing terrain". In effect, by mapping out the processes that transform lived places into spaces that are definitively outside the "culture of imperialism," or simply affiliates of the global / national as necessary playthings of this

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[21] In his book *Branded By Law: Looking at India's Denotified Tribes* (2001), Dilip D'Souza provides the socio-historical context that I will be looking at in Mahasweta's fiction. Historicizing the British colonial law, *Criminal Tribes Act* of 1871, D'Souza writes, "[i]t notified about 150 tribes throughout India as criminal, giving the police wide powers to arrest their members and monitor their movements. In its effect this was a very simple law, far simpler than others that offered elaborate definitions of arcane crimes. Under this Act, just being born into 150 tribes defined you a criminal. You exist, the Act said to the members of these tribes, thus you are a criminal. Nor was this seen as particularly odd. There was even a notion that in caste-ridden India it was just the way things were meant to be. As T. V. Stephens, a British official of the time, said...: '[P]eople from time immemorial have been pursuing the caste system defined job-positions: weaving, carpentry and such were hereditary jobs. So there must have been hereditary criminals who pursued their forefathers' profession.' It took independent India five years, till 1952, to repeal *Criminal Tribes Act*. This repeal meant that 150 tribes were no longer to be called 'criminal'. Notified in 1871, they were now "denotified", and that is what they are officially called today. As often happens, that term in its turn acquired derogatory connotations. And, in any case, even half a century later, they are still routinely called criminal and perceived to be so, for colonial attitudes die hard" (D'Souza 2001: 2-3).

decolonization, these stories carry a pedagogic value through interventionist writing that urges the reader to rethink postcoloniality and power relations that it posits.

> But he could not utter a single word in his own defense. Standing still under the moon, listening to their deafening voices, shivering at the rubbing of their organs against his body, Singh knew that the ill-nourished and ridiculous body of an ordinary Indian was the worst possible crime in the history of civilization. He knew he was condemned, sentenced to death. He delivered the judgement on himself, sentencing himself to death, because he, too, was responsible for the diminutive height of these Agarias. "Yes, the death sentence for me," he wanted to say, and lifted his face towards the moon. They were still cackling, still dancing, still rubbing their penises against him. The recourse left to Singh was to go stark, raving mad, tearing the expanse apart with a howl like that of a mad dog. But why wasn't his brain ordering his vocal chords to scream and scream and scream? Only tears ran down his cheeks ("Shishu" 250-51).

At the same time, in Mahasweta's stories, as we see in the above-mentioned quotation from "Shishu," often the narrative "zooms out" to address an audience who may not be able to imagine the Agaria tribal or the subaltern's reality, but gets a distinct picture of the repercussions it has on characters like Singh and Puran. In effect, "Shishu" is also about a process of refraction through which Aboriginality and subaltern realities are represented. There is an appeal to, for lack of a better word, the universal, which as I understand is an appeal to *every* "historical other" (Spivak 2003: 80), in Singh's realizations and Puran's discoveries. As Spivak writes, "*Pterodactyl* courts planetarity, and the defamiliarization of the home does not carry the class-gendered meaning at all. Who knows how much of this is my transactionality as reader? Does one ever know? I have tried to be as scrupulous as possible" (Spivak 2003: 77-8).

Spivak's reading of planetarity in *PT*, then, productively builds on an admitted need for an active readerly interpretation. Spivak's point that *PT courts* planetarity is a

necessary interpretation and, simultaneously, aware that it is emerging from a "transaction" that the reader strikes with the text in order to engage with it in more than one way. Spivak, in this lecture, is speaking of the text in order to seek a future for the new Comparative Literature and compares Mahasweta's *Pterodactyl* (1984) with Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902) and Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* (1966).

In this lecture, speaking of "collectivities," who are able to "cross borders," Spivak's tells us, "[t]he planet is easily claimed" (Spivak 2003: 72). If we read this comment along with the quotation on Singh's realizations in relation to, and *also* at the expense of, the Agaria tribals' subalternity, some questions may be posited that allow us to understand the necessary politics of meaning-making in Mahasweta's stories. Singh's self-incriminating realizations, particularly because he is a character who can momentarily transgress the chasm between the "culture of imperialism" and the Aboriginal world (comparable to the "border" that the "planetary" subject is also able to "cross" in Spivak's discussion), then, makes us wonder about the other possibilities of the one who could "easily" *claim* the "planet". Indeed, it is not the Aboriginal men and women, the reality, which is the springboard for Singh's "realizations," as it were, that can "easily" lay this claim on planetarity of thought or action. These tribal men and women remain incarcerated in the violence of the global-local binary. It is, as Spivak implies in her discussion, the privileged characters like Singh, Puran, and Mahasweta's readers who can easily claim the planet. At the same time, Singh and Puran's realizations, even if they seem too "pious" or "earnest" to us, are necessary refractions of a reality that cannot be portrayed without such dynamics, and more importantly, a

"strategically indeterminate provocation to thought and action" (Findlay 368) that must be recuperated in their fictional, unreal, "elitist," if they may seem to be, and metaphoric terms. Also, this metaphorization needs to be a "responsible" program that takes into account a definite logic of literality and is able to "respond" to the "real" in the sense I have discussed earlier. Herein, we see Mahasweta's "dual strategy" of making meaning in fiction. Reality is not coercively represented in Mahasweta's fiction but refracted through "privileged" characters and "privileged" moments created by meaning-making enterprises within the text. This attempt to know the subaltern reality of the Aboriginal peoples cannot be discounted because of its fictional and symbolic affiliations. One is reminded of Spivak's words, to "be human is to be intended toward the other" (Spivak 2003: 73). Thus, I maintain, while a persistent critique of the binary logic of global-local is necessary, as we see in Dirlik's formulations, planetarity, as a reading strategy, could be used to understand the literary value of this critique that takes into account the social-political aspects at every step. This is so because it is the text and its meanings that allow us to the claim a planetarity of thought and action if we use it in our readings of Mahasweta's stories.

"Shishu" highlights stark contradictions of postcoloniality and challenges for decolonization that cannot be ignored. It is a complex story in which the irony of decolonization is suggested through the emaciated and starved bodies of members of the Agaria tribal community, whose physicality has come to be imagined as "child-like," "underdeveloped" and, of course, "primitive" (248). A single paragraph from the story will explain how the community was seen to be a hindrance in the path of development, as a character explains,

> [t]welve or fourteen years ago, the Indian government sent a team of geologists and other people to prospect for iron ore at Lohri. The Agarias of Kuva village were real troublemakers. They said that the hills were the abode of the three asuras – Lohasur, Koilasur, and Agaiyasur – who wouldn't let outsiders violate the sacred territory or allow prospecting there. As far as the Agarias were concerned, those three asuras were already angry with the unhappy tribe. Prospecting for iron ore would only seal the deal of the Agarias. But the outsiders were educated people who could not be expected to submit to Agaria superstitions. The two officers from the Punjab and the geologist from South India had no fear of the asuras. They blasted the hills with dynamite." "And then?" "The Agarias of Kuva Village hacked everyone of the team to death ("Shishu" 239).

Set in the latter part of the 1970s, "Shishu" takes us to the land of Lohri in non-urban India that was the home of Agaria community and was of considerable interest to the government before its plans of excavating iron ores were disrupted due to "tribal unrest". The story is narrated in the form of conversations between the "honest and incorruptible" (248) relief officer and the district's block development officer. The story builds on "information," myths, prejudices and the largely absent presence of several members of the Agaria community, who, we learn, have disappeared from the Kuva village, and the ways in which this community and its sudden disappearance have been perceived by others. The legend that most prominently defines this community – apart from stories that suggest they are descended from demons, drink fire, mine iron ore, and bathe in a river of fire – is that these lost members are "child-like" in their physical appearance, and, often referred to as non-human, even "spectral beings" (248). *Shishu*, the Bengali word, means "child" and is also used in its generic form. We learn that the government has set up a relief camp to treat victims of cholera and typhoid in the area. As the good relief officer is warned by the block development officer that the place is haunted, we are told

that these seemingly child-like spectral beings often indulge in stealing food materials from the stock of the relief camps.

> Mr. Singh, that place has a bad reputation. People say that the place is still haunted by the *asuras, the bongas* – tribal ghosts and deities with evil power. I saw the children who were running away with the bags. They were not like human children." "What did you say?" "Their arms and legs... they were different." "Different? In what way?"
>
> "I can't explain. They had long hair... but it was the way they cackled... " ("Shishu" 241-42)

The conversations that take place between these officials open up several contradictions that lie in portrayal of their haunted image. The mysterious story that these child-like figures emerge from the forested areas and steal food from the relief camps does not support the view that it is a community of "spectral beings" who are capable of doing anything they would like to. As we learn from the last section of the story, when the relief officer confronts the Agarias after chasing them for having stolen two sacks of rice, we are told, "[t]hey were human beings born of human parents, not spectral beings. Spectral beings didn't steal milo and rice" (248).

In the final scene, when the so-called spectral beings emerge as famished Agaria tribals who escaped persecution at the hands of the police by hiding in the forests, speculation around their identity as the mysterious "child-like" beings does not get resolved because Singh is the only witness to this scene. Singh's encounter with the Agaria tribals makes him realize that he too is implicated within the very power structures that caused the Agaria tribals to have malnourished and "underdeveloped" bodies as "adult citizens of India" (250) or bodies that can only evoke fear and disbelief. These ghastly bodies are victimized at two levels. Firstly, and most directly, by the concept of

development: it is because the geologist intended to exploit the mineral resources of the sacred land that they killed the team and went into hiding. And secondly, even after their disappearance their decaying bodies are consumed in the form of prejudices (which goes on to provide an "identity" to the community) that are derived from their imagined difference. The story traces how this "difference" in physicality came into existence in the first place. Before I analyze the last scene, and particularly Singh's epiphanic realizations in greater detail, I want to mention some other aspects of the story where we find the implications of the cycle of oppression, which can be fully uncovered when we examine the story closely.

In one of the sections where the block development officer explains to the relief officer the several reasons why the Agaria community cannot be helped, and how their superstitious and backward way of living is the cause of all their problems, the official says,

> "... Give them land – they simply sell it to the moneylender. Then they place a countercharge on us. 'Where's the water? And seeds, the plow, the bullocks? How are we to till the land?' And if you supply them with those, they sell them, too, and say, 'How are we to survive till the fields are harvested? We had to borrow and now we have to pay by selling the land.'" ("Shishu" 237)

Even without forgetting that the official is exaggerating the "aid" that is made available for the Agarias, we can perhaps identify a cycle because of which members of this community are always "in debt". Since there is never enough to make a living on a day-to-day basis, the Agarias seek help from local money lenders who charge them interest at extortionate rates. In short, we have here an indication of how tribal people are first victimized by local moneylenders, then by government policies, as the "aid" that is

eventually provided does not take into consideration the magnitude of the situation. The "aid" always falls short of the crisis.[22] However, Mahasweta's style of writing is not merely a sociological documentation of facts or events. As we see in this short excerpt, she makes the disbelieving and mocking perpetrators, or "agents of decolonization," speak of the problems experienced by the Agaria community while reading the problems in terms of an always pervasive condition or "habit" of the community. It is, I think, in this double narrative of the community that we can locate Mahasweta's interventionist critique.

Although we are told that some members of the Agaria community are eager to help the relief camp, we realize that there is a difference in the ways these members, who are present in the narrative, are perceived compared to those who have disappeared from the Kuva village after killing the team of geologists that was sent by the government. These young Agaria men are more "familiar" than those working with the officials at the relief camp. We also learn that the famine-like state and spreading of diseases were, in a way, caused by the police officers after they failed to capture the group of Agarias that disappeared. The police, we are told, burnt the Kuva village and sprinkled salt over cultivable land after they could not trace the Agarias.

> We need men to fetch water to the camp, to keep the camp clean, to scrub the pots for cooking gruel. Select ten boys from the village and write down their names. They'll do all the work. They'll get food and a

[22] In "Douloti," the author traces the factors that lead to the rise of the "Land-lender" as the "new agri-capitalist class" as complicit with government enterprises that affect tribal people and critiques how this "caste is created by the independent government of India" ("Douloti" 49). She also suggests that government relies on the support of this "caste".

> rupee a day as wages. "They'd do everything just for food." ("Shishu" 245)

While this notion that the tribals would be willing to "do everything" for food, and the exploitation of the community on the basis of this notion is more thoroughly dealt with in "Douloti," in "Shishu" this gains a different currency. When we find government officials, whose presence is meant to help the Agarias, say, "[t]hey'd do everything just for food," we know from this specific context that there is something deeply problematic about the "approach" in which "aid" is provided. It is as we will see in "Douloti," this very thought that the need for food can *make* the *adivasis* "do everything," such as carrying out chores for organizing the relief camp, becomes telling of how labour is exploited by the very benevolent agents whose job is to help the community.

As Mahasweta writes, in "Year of the Birth – 1871" (2002), "the Government of India's sole drive is to "develop" the tribals, so that they can become like the "main stream". The privileged tribals have become like the mainstream where they have not received equal-acceptance and also, have become 'detribed.'" We see the approach that the government adopts for the tribals is one of merely recognizing "need," and to a limited extent, without recognizing the "people" who live their daily lives with the "need". Indeed it is possible to suggest from such a critique that government measures actually promote a highly permeable class structure within marginalized communities even while "helping" them. In Mahasweta's critique of the government's attempt to "develop" the tribals is also present a bitter irony. It is an irony that I find best articulated in Manorajan Mohanty's comments.

As Mohanty suggests, the emphasis on the economic development of the country has resulted in processes of liberalization and globalization, processes that "isolate the non-economic considerations from the focal economic considerations of growth and profit" (Mohanty 23). The notion of the "main-stream," that Mahasweta criticizes, is, thus, also a "mainstreaming" of non-economic concerns and aspects, such as the importance of Aboriginal identity to Aboriginal peoples, into a single government-regulated motive: "economic development". While this economic development is, certainly, welcome, it should be also noted that it definitely affects marginalized communities in diverse ways that nationalistic visions of globalization and liberalization cannot fathom. It is so because this vision of "development" is not attendant to all the needs of these communities. Thus non-economic needs do not qualify as "needs" in the definitions and "aid" that arrive from the "culture of imperialism".

> The old man was now closer still to Singh. His penis touched Singh, now in front, now from behind. A dry, unholy touch. Making him impure. Like the touch of the dried, sloughed-off skin of a snake.
>
> There are only fourteen of us left. Our bodies have shrunk without food. Our men are impotent, our women are barren. That's why we steal relief. Don't you know we need food to grow to a human size again? ("Shishu" 249)

The story comes full circle when the Agarias who stole from the relief camp confront Singh, and he realizes that they are adult citizens of India who have been fashioned by the system that made them physically different from the stature of the "ordinary Indian" ("Shishu" 250). He learns that his sympathies and his honest service in providing food to this community meant little in the larger scheme of things, until he found out how he too is implicated in preserving the oppression that ensures that the Agarias remain starved

and stay at the mercy of government aids. Mahasweta's fiction is deeply ironical at this point and does not need to draw a clear cause-and-effect relation of how the "well-meaning" Singh goes on to socially structure the presence of the subaltern subject. Nevertheless, we as readers know that the point of the narrative is for Singh to "deliver the judgement on himself" (250) because that was what the Agarias intended when they confronted him after the chase, and made him feel their nakedness by ruthlessly rubbing their genitals against him.

> Singh's shadow covered their bodies. And the shadow brought the realization home to him. They hated his height of five feet and nine inches. They hated the normal growth of his body. His normalcy was a crime they could not forgive. Singh's cerebral cells tried to register the logical explanation but he failed to utter a single word. Why, why this revenge? He was just an ordinary Indian. He didn't have the stature of a healthy Russian, Canadian, or American. He did not eat food that supplied enough calories for a human body. The World Health Organization said it was a crime to deny the human body of the right number of calories ("Shishu" 250).

Mahasweta critiques the decolonization that does not attend to the "local". However, her interventionist writing does not stay there. By delineating how oppressive structures such as caste, gender, poverty, and institutionalization of bonded labour cause subject formation, Mahasweta's fiction suggests a need to understand people and their places in their own terms. Although always affected and conditioned by the global forces, as we see in Mohanty's argument, and the brand of decolonization that she challenges, her emphasis on places, or the "local" as local first – as opposed to the reference to "local" for the sake of narrating "the global" or "the national" – within literary representations, urges us to reconsider them in interpretation. In other words, places in these short stories need not be understood as mere "spaces," or what Dirlik calls "products or geographical

equivalent of a commodity" (Dirlik 18), but as places that are "products *and* work,"[23] i.e. a process that needs to be addressed in interpretations. It is a process that needs to be alive to the necessities of the local. In "The Hunt" and "Douloti," Mahasweta draws our attention to the figure of the female subaltern. The female characters, as we rightly assume, are at the nadir of deprivation. Mary Oraon occupies a curious position of "power" because in her society she is not really a tribal woman. As we learn from Mahasweta's somewhat evocative prose,

> You wouldn't call her tribal at first sight. Yet she is tribal. Once upon a time whites had *timber plantations* in Kuruda. They left gradually after Independence. Mary's mother looked after the Dixon's bungalow and household. Dixon's son came back in 1959 and sold the house, the forest, everything else. He put Mary in Bhikni's womb before he left. He went to Australia. The padre at the local church christened her Mary. Bhikni was still a *Christian*. But when Prasadji from Ranchi came to live in the Dixon bungalow and refused to employ Bhikni, she gave up *Christianity* ("The Hunt" 2).

Mahasweta's prose, here, is defamiliarizing, evocative, historical and, also, carries a curiously personalized narration of Mary's background. I refer to the prose as defamiliarizing because of the ways in which a gradual normalization, through readily available explanations ("causes") that have been contingent upon historic and political events along with their multiple repercussions, is seen to percolate in the private lives of these characters. Concomitant with this process of normalization, or trickling down of the political, and the trace of the "personal" that these lives could claim to possess,

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[23] In my analysis, I interpret Dirlik's use of the term "work" as not simply "labour", but as a signifier of processes and dynamic workings of oppression against Aboriginal peoples that are eventually denied and erased. In effect, the denial or erasure transforms "places" into "spaces", as Mahasweta's fiction insists and promotes the status quo.

pervades a brutal irony: her interventionist stance. Short, staccato sentences provide the information that is necessary to situate Mary. Prasadji, who had initially refused to employ her mother because of her religion years back, eventually exploits Mary.

> Everyone says Prasadji is most fortunate. He pays Bhikni a wage. With Mary the agreement is for board and lodging, clothing and sundries. The Dixon bungalow was built as residence for whites. Bhikni says the white kept twelve ayahs- servants - sweepers. Under Prasadji, Mary alone keeps the huge bungalow clean ("The Hunt" 3).

Mary's story is also replete with contradictions that end with Mary killing the man who wants to sexually exploit her. This brings in a celebratory verve of the hunt. However, before foregrounding notions of "resistances," which can only take place within the pages of this fiction, the story situates Mary's position as an "insider-outsider" in the tribal society and creates the specific conditions for such a "resistance". Men (tribal men included) desire her, but Mary – unlike women in *Adivasi* communities where pre-marital sex is not considered a taboo – violently protects herself from the aggressive advances of several such men. We are told she scares them away with her machete. At the same time, not unlike other tribal characters in Mahasweta's stories, Mary is not just a symbol of resistance or simply a subject position. There are moments in which Mary as a character exceeds the limitations imposed upon her by her society. And it is in these moments that we find Mahasweta provides an alternative, and quite contradictory perspective on Mary's character. For instance, even though we see Mary retaliating whenever men approach her, there is a part in Mary that wants to be accepted by the Oraons. Mary realizes that she is still an "outsider," in the sense she wants to "belong" to the community, because she is an "illegitimate daughter" of a "white father" (16). At the

same time, Mary's longing to be a part of the community is not really seen as contradictory when she finally decides to kill the Tehsildar because we somehow know she would not have, perhaps, done it had she not been an "outsider". And later when she is about to kill the Tehsildar in her state of intoxication she finds in the Tehsildar's face a hint of something that resembles an animal (16):

> Because she is the illegitimate daughter of a white father the Oraons don't think of her as their blood and do not place the harsh injunctions of their society upon her. She would have rebelled if they had. She is unhappy that they don't. In her innermost heart there is somewhere a longing to be a part of the Oraons ("The Hunt" 6).

As I have suggested, the metaphor of the hunt undergoes a change because "the hunter," temporarily, within the pages of this fiction, becomes "the hunted". However, more importantly, it also puts forth a trajectory for the notion of "resistance" as it is seen in Mary's narrative. Resistance, as we see in this story, is seen to be emerging from a marginalized, interstitial position and, at the same time, in its articulation of this resistance the readers are also meant to reconsider the entire system and how it structures Mary's marginality. In other words, despite its celebratory verve, the forces of oppression that would victimize Mary as a woman, successfully victimize her as a labourer, and the Tehsildar's death does not ensure the economic security that Mary's resistance addresses as well. Her exploitation as an unpaid labourer at the hands of (19) Prasadji reveals the complicities between different modes of exploitation that create an immensely stable victim position for Mary. While her rage against men who intended to exploit her sexually culminates in an idealized and glorified act of "resistance," Mahasweta's writing does not see it as functioning separately from her victim status as an

unpaid and overworked worker in Prasadji's plantations. Her story is well aware of these connections and the act of resistance does not dissolve the real problems against which Mary is, perhaps, too weak to "resist". But in this process of "glorification," through a transient yet powerful metaphor, the text also stages its own method of representation and, I suggest, indigenizes its politics of representation. Indigenizing, as Linda Smith suggests in relation to indigenous research and methodologies, is, "inevitably political" (Smith 178) and implies a "broader politics [with] strategic goals" (143). It is, thus, possible to suggest that though Mary as "hunter" is a symbolic construct, it is through this symbol that the text indigenizes its representations of Aboriginal India and critiques a "broader politics". Symbolizations, however, are best strategically employed and must be carefully analyzed in terms of their aspirations. Mahasweta's commitment to the act of intervention becomes all the more pronounced and lies in her portrayal of Mary Oraon's subject position – a figure who is neither "tribal" nor an "outsider" – one who is only seemingly empowered with her machete, and one who is always the "hunted" in reality.

The fact that Mary claims Prasad's mahua trees as her own by relying upon the "government regulation" does not imply that the said regulations are meant to help Mary in any way, or that Prasad is benevolent enough to allow her to pick the fruits from the trees on his property. We are not allowed to forget that the felling of the trees and government occupation of forested areas that belonged to Aboriginal communities are recurrent themes in all the stories and, particularly, in "The Hunt" they speak of dispossession and exploitation. Just as the government exploits resources by deforesting tribal land and by creating an agri-capitalist class, Prasadji - who is the representative of this class - exploits Mary without paying her and, in turn, is also an exploited figure. The

figures of the corrupt Tehsildar (or a revenue office) and a contractor suggest an ongoing process of contracts and complicities being created and negotiated that further enables a fairly stable way of exploitation of the land and communities at multiple levels (Vyas 84). Earlier in the story when the contractor comes to Prasad's house to strike a deal to buy timber from him, we are told -

> The contractor praised the uninstructed ignorance of his caste-brothers, Prasad, Mulni and Lalchand. The idiots don't even know what good they are abandoning. He has given Banwari a rupee per tree in secret. This too leaves him a wide margin of profit. Countless trees will be ready for felling in a few years. Prasad must be kept happy ("The Hunt" 8).

But one needs to ask at this point, how does mapping out the details of the system through various practices of exploitation help Mahasweta's writing in recreating the lost value of places that, as I have suggested earlier, is recuperated in this fiction? In this context, something remains to be said about the method in which all the stories reveal the multiple ways in which such complicities are formed that not only manufacture systemic oppression, but also effectively transform places into "product-like spaces" (Dirlik). These "spaces," in Dirlik's analysis "geographical equivalent of commodities" (Dirlik 18), are where decolonization does not function as a continuously engaged process but one that is received from above, and one where it serves as a receptacle of the manoeuvrings of the newly independent nation-state. I would like to suggest that herein we can find Mahasweta's pedagogic interventions. By tracing the politics behind this deprivation, and attributing it to multiple levels that transforms the places into spaces, Mahasweta not only locates the fiction of independence, but also, as Dirlik suggests, constructs "new contexts for thinking about politics and production of knowledge". According to Dirlik,

"[p]lace conceived as project provides a context in which we may reformulate the ways in which we think of spaces presently" (Dirlik 21).

That these places are fundamentally about land and its people, and the many stories of that land that have been, or about to be, transformed into "multi-storeyed buildings" through the developmentalist logic of spaces, cannot be forgotten. At the same time, in the act of recounting the stories of these places, a significant shift has to take place that can provide us with new ways of thinking; or to use Dirlik's provocative paradox: "new contexts". It is, thus, by providing new contexts that Mahasweta's "engagement" with Aboriginal India allows us to think of systemic exploitation directly in relation to Mary's act of resistance.

In "Douloti," we are told that Douloti's father, Ganori Nagesia, becomes a bonded labourer after the country's independence. Within the context of this story, this transcending of colonizer-colonized relationship in the post-independent context becomes significant because we see both a perpetuation of this relationship across time, and in such a way that Douloti too ends up becoming a bonded sex worker. This is also the time, as the story indicates, when the government has apparently abolished the system of bonded labour. Since bondage is supported by "debts" of tribal people (with moneylenders) that are accumulated at an ever-increasing compounded rate of interest, the "bondage" never really disappears. The system, we learn, is further enabled by lack of food and land.

Not only does this "abolition" mean little in this terrain, but the same authorities practice a curious method of collecting data and information about the tribal communities

that seems to belie what abolitionist ideals would promise. With a reference to the census of 1961, a character says that the community, "knows what can happen if human beings are counted like cows and sheep" ("Douloti" 31). The unfamiliarity of this practice is further highlighted because subjects of this census do not understand the system. The people who are counted like this simply believe that the practice is not a good one. "There was a census at the time of my father's father. And right away a big Hunger, a real famine. All the new babies were deaf and dumb" (31). The census not only dehumanizes the community, but goes on to making a different narrative, or "the history," of the community. As a voice questions,

> [w]hat sort of a thing is this? You won't write the names of children who are dead? Dead or alive they are my children. Their names won't be in the government books? ("Douloti" 32)

The census, then, creates a spatial narrative of the place and we hear in the voice of the nameless tribal character who challenges norms of a spatial marking of a place at a moment when such norms are imposed on to the land and its people. The unfamiliarity of the system that is being used on communities that are already exploited is further revealed when another character asks the official: "No, no, how can I be sixty? How can I have more age than he? The master has more land, more money, everything more than me. How can he have less age? No, sir, write ten or twenty" (32).

The "connections" that the logic of capital and bonded-labour maps out are generational and ideological, local and transnational, and, in Mahasweta's writing, they are portrayed through simultaneously "affective" (Spivak 1990: 112) and interventionist

strategies. The social system that makes Douloti a bonded sex worker is interpreted by Spivak in the following words:

> Woman's body is thus the last instance in a system whose general regulator is still the loan: the usurer's capital, imbricated, level by level, in national industrial and transnational global capital. This, if you like, is the connection (Spivak 1990: 112).

I will briefly attempt to explore how these capitalist affiliations are mapped out in Douloti's story in a way that finally locates the woman's body as "the last instance". With a reference to the Indo-China war of 1962, we are told in a tone of unmistakable irony of the distance and nearness, the differences and sameness between "the local" and "the global," and its ways of viewing the nation. When the women in the brothel where Dolouti is employed as a sex worker learn that there is a "fight" (65) going on, they assume that it is a usual "fight" between two individuals that takes place at the market regularly, and decide to pay a visit to watch the event. On their return, they are rather disappointed. When one of the workers, Somni, is asked about her experience, she says:

> --What's the fight?
>
> --Who knows? They are fighting some China.
>
> --Whose fight?
>
> --Someone called India, his. I didn't understand anything.
>
> --Rampiyari said, "Did you see Latia?"
>
> --He is shouting the most.
>
> --That is the contractors' fight. Come, make some tea. Have some yourselves and give me some. ("Douloti" 65)

Besides revealing the distance between already marked spaces, as suggested through a mock personification of "India" and "China," the passage also becomes crucial for our understanding of the particulars of gender roles within the system of exploitation, and the "connections," that Spivak suggests, identify woman's body as "the last instance in a system whose general regulator is still the loan: the usurer's capital". Somni and Douloti may not know what "India" and "China" mean, however, they are fully aware that they refer to, in some way or other, to the contractors. In other words, this fight is gendered and economic, "local" and transnational, because it is about the contractors who are hired by the government for the purpose of deforestation of tribal land. We know it is "the contractors' fight". The "contractors," or the "middle men," whose presence in this space is justified by government undertakings motivated by developmentalist logic, are also the men who eventually become the sex workers' clients during their stay in this region. The presence of the "contractors" also results in the tribal women – most of whom have been either abducted or sold off by their families – being exploitatively employed as sex workers finding clients, but that is not the end of the flow of the logic of the "usurer's capital". The women's earnings are taken away by the brothels' owners, such as Paramananda, with an excuse to pay off "their debts" that were incurred by their husbands and fathers as bonded labourers of land-lenders in the first place. Thus the irrevocable debt, as we see in Douloti's story, is finally paid off by Douloti with her life. However, the debt was paid over and over again by her and her father. A deeply moving paragraph tells us of this continuation of bondage and how it doubly silences the figure of the female subaltern:

> Her father stumbled on his face when he tried to pull the cart, with the ox yoke on his shoulders, at Munabar's command. His broken body gave him the name Crook. And Douloti has taken the yoke of Crook's bond-slavery on her shoulders. Now Latia is her client; her body is tight. Then going down and down Douloti will be as skeletal as Somni. She will repay the bond-slavery loan as a beggar ("Douloti" 57).

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to go back to some of the theories I have discussed in my analysis. Dirlik's notions on "place-based identities," and their trajectories in times when those places lie at the brink of transformation, is useful because he reminds us that contrary to the logic of capital, where developmentalist rhetoric and forces of globalization merely treat places as a "means to an end," (Dirlik 19) a new approach to places allows us to reconsider radical politics. Thus, whereas a nationalist brand of decolonization treats places as products or passive recipients of decolonization, a radical politics that invokes places with a "new awareness" attempt to reread them in terms of their coercive transformations. Such invocations of places, as we see in Mahasweta's stories, are qualitatively different and duplicate a process of retrieval by foregrounding, re/historicizing and intervening in systemic exploitation while repositioning her fiction. By using Dirlik's formulations, I have tried to locate how none of these actively engaged processes of retrieval can be read in isolation, or as strategies in themselves in Mahasweta's stories, and, consequently, need to be read as a part of a larger literary program that teaches the reader the commitments of decolonization and interrogates radical politics. At the same time, Mahasweta's fiction offers more than a mere exposition of the failures of decolonization through sociological facts, and also urges us to uncompromisingly revaluate an excess (of "facts") in terms of its literary and symbolic

potential. This is where Dirlik's concepts, in my estimation, fall short of explaining the call for the symbolic.

Be it Mary Oraon's glorified and idealized revenge or Singh's agential act of shedding tears after he realizes his complicity in victimizing the Agaria tribals, or the image of the bonded sex workers, all the stories end with images that make the reader go back to the beginning to rethink how the political is articulated through personalized narratives of oppression, and the ways in which the narratives shuttle between decolonization as it is known and its other unfamiliar variants in unfamiliar spaces. We cannot know what the reader thinks; however, we can speculate what the writing attempts to do to the reader. The reader, by tracing this, it is hoped will participate in an intervention as well. And it is in this "act" of attempting to make the reader rethink, not unlike the way Singh does, that these images and endings due to violent oppression usher in the need for what Sherene Razack has suggested is a "politics of accountability" and not a redundant "politics of inclusion" (Razack 330).

> Accountability begins with tracing relations of privilege and penalty. It cannot proceed unless we examine our complicity. Only then can we ask questions about how we are understanding differences and for what purpose (Razack 330).

In Singh's realization and his helpless state of simply being able to shed tears, his inability to go mad, along with his desperate need to think and act, we can perhaps locate a shift that seems to indicate a movement away from what Razack has referred to as an essentialist "politics of inclusion": one that manages and retains "difference". A politics of accountability, on the other hand, acknowledges ones complicity, questions dominant narratives of decolonization and interrogates the factors that create "difference," or

"aggravated inequalities," in the first place. Such a politics would also usher in a form of decolonization that is attuned to local complexities and necessities, and create a new postcolonial subject on the lines of the "concept-metaphor" of postcoloniality that Spivak speaks of. However, if accountability is to be understood as indigenizing one's approach towards the Aboriginal literary text, then, I would like to repeat a line from "Planetarity," with a little variation in my emphasis this time.

As Spivak writes, "*Pterodactyl* courts planetarity, and the defamiliarization of the home does not carry the class-gendered meaning at all..." (Spivak 77-78). In defamiliarizing the familiar narrative of facts of violence that make Mahasweta's fiction, Spivak's critique is precisely suggesting a strategy already encoded in this fiction. The critique is not a charge against the fiction but an active interpretation that, I suggest, "performs" its own accountability ("an allegory of reading" [Spivak 74]) while it provides new ways of negotiating with this literature. It is, as Spivak's analysis suggests, a strategy of generalization of the particular; of, indeed, zooming out like the master storyteller who knows the details all too well that, after a point, the whole must necessarily become far more powerful than the little facts that make it. This, I think, is the literary value of Mahasweta's journalistic intervention. In Puran's report and Singh's interior monologue there is, then, not an appeal to the "universal" but reclamation of the "universal" even as it simply seems to appeal to it. We may also understand these instances as a call for solidarities of a different kind that, indeed, "courts" the planetarity of connections that need to be addressed in the event of formation and emergence of new documentation of Aboriginalities.

The strength of this strategy is, perhaps, its irony. The defamiliarization of the "home" or the "local" contexts that provides the little geographical, historical, and socio-economic facts, is, finally, turned against itself: we see a blurring out of the specifics for the sake of a form of planetarity that "does not carry the class-gendered meaning at all," and those that Mahasweta's stories initially sought to distinguish between the "culture of imperialism" and those spaces that are left out of decolonization. The politics of such abandonment of the particulars is a negation of the "politics of inclusion" that manage differences and sustain binaries, and, paradoxically, produces the "undifferentiated mass" called "India" (Spivak 1993: 78). This abdication is strategic and the only way the literary text can participate in the literary program (which is always already a political one as well) of activism for a reader who can relate to the "we" that inhabits the planet "on loan" (Spivak 2003: 72). In this sense, Mahasweta's narrative performs its own impossibility of supplementing activism, and, I would suggest, thereby, earns a distinct literary value by reclaiming the language to critique oppression and violence in the aftermath of decolonization.

{Conclusion}

Mahasweta Devi and Alexis Wright, Figuring Decolonization, Together

> I would like to see if the text could possibly sustain the turning of identitarian monuments into documents of reconstellation. [...] I keep feeling that there are connections to be made that I cannot make, that pluralization may allow the imagining of a necessary yet impossible planetarity in ways that neither my reader nor I know yet (Spivak 2003: 91-92).

My thesis has explored problems of analyzing literatures that engage with Aboriginality in the aftermath of decolonization. I have highlighted aspects that, I think, must be remembered and negotiated while analyzing texts that speak of "Aboriginalities" (Langton 100). Just as "speaking for" cannot be interpreted as implying "patronizing care" (Weaver 224), as evidenced in the context of Mahasweta's stories; it is "because" her stories speak, the literature that this act of "speaking" produces concerns me just as much the contexts that are described. Thus I have analyzed her stories both in terms of the thematic concerns and her style of writing.

Carpentaria with its array of characters, Aboriginal storytelling traditions, and portrayal of its material context offers us an alternative way of engaging with Aboriginality through the nuanced figure of the Aboriginal *briocleur,* which I have examined. While Mahasweta calls for "ethical singularity" (*IM* 201) of the postcolonial subject in the figure of Puran, Wright argues for the "Self-Defined Dream" for Aboriginal empowerment, and the need to dream fearlessly in order to be able to envision a future on Indigenous terms. The "future" that Wright imagines in *Carpentaria*, as I have

suggested, is not "out there" but grounded in the understanding of material symbols of everyday life, as practised and lived. In other words, *Carpentaria* makes us consider our "critical strategies" in relation to the Pricklebush community by presenting, revealing and deconstructing effects of settler-colonialism and global capital.

I have argued for a particularized application of the Sartrean notion of "engagement" to suggest that Mahasweta's stories on Aboriginality cannot be seen as less significant on the grounds of not having an identitarian affiliation. Thus I have compared Mahasweta's fiction with *Carpentaria* with the conviction that, as readers, we may need to reformulate our concerns when we engage with Aboriginality within the literary text. And by "concerns" I mean to suggest this: just as approaches need to be reformulated because the critic is "not" surprisingly required to negotiate with the text closely, take into account the "language games" (Spivak 1987: 267) through figures and symbols, s/he is also forced to realize that in the event of "aggravated inequality," "speaking for" is, actually, an admission of the "double bind" – that "one cannot not want to inhabit but which one is obliged to critique or change" (Krishna 2009: 99) - that I have discussed my first chapter.

The authors in my corpus critique and interpret decolonization in diverse ways, and it is in this critique that I locate their solidarity. It is the representation of decolonization within nation-states, and the alternatives that the notion of a decolonized future posits in each of the texts that are necessary to be read in conjunction with one another. The figures that both the authors present are comparable, telling of diverse

histories and, at the same time, they represent decolonization as imagined, in opposition to "decolonization *as such*" (Spivak 1989: 78).

While I do recognize the term "Aboriginal literature" may not be justified with the inclusion of Mahasweta's fiction because she is not an Aboriginal person, the importance of Aboriginality as the "field of intersubjectivity, as a process of dialogue, of imagination, of representation and interpretation" (Langton 1994: 100) in relation to "Aboriginalities," is crucial to be understood through comparisons such as mine. It is here that we need to concentrate on Mahasweta's journalistic approach, her metaphor-making strategies, while we examine Puran's reactions to Pirtha and the pterodactyl, and Wright's mock-epical vision of the town of Desperance in order to come to terms with the literary and the "literality" in their critique.

Taking a clue from Bhabha, I have analyzed the "cusps" where the "more complex cultural and political boundaries" (Bhabha 1994: 173) of *Carpentaria* reside, and are rendered unfamiliar to the reader. It has also allowed me to understand what when the so-called Aboriginal literary text decides to speak, it can and often does, speak in diverse ways that defy "culturally holistic" approaches. Thus, I suggest, both Mahasweta and Wright rewrite the story of resistance through their literary interventions.

Also, if "figures" as representations, as I have noted, are transgressive and aporetic because of the "undecidabilty of the figure" (Spivak 2003: 72), they are also, in a way, pedagogic. There is something to be learned from representations of Aboriginalities after we have negotiated with them in the light of their uneasy relationship with history.

It is, perhaps, for this reason, Spivak, speaking of "ethical singularity" in Mahasweta's writing, suggests in her "Afterword" to *Imaginary Maps* –

> I have no doubt that we must *learn* to learn from the original practical ecological philosophers of the world, through the slow, attentive, mind-changing (on both sides), ethical singularity that deserves the name of "love" – to supplement necessary collective efforts, to change laws, modes of production, systems of education and health care (Spivak 1995: 200-201).

To "learn to learn from" is also to "unlearn" one's assumptions and indigenize one's approach. It is, then, this method of "unlearning" that can be mobilized to engage with Aboriginalities. Unlearning also requires us to transform our "critical strategies" (Eigenbrod 71) and, thus, allows us to reformulate our questions and concerns. *PT* and *Carpentaria also* enable us problematize the concept of "realism," and do so without deflecting from the materiality that marks these texts. It is, then, the approach, the method, and politics of representation that must be considered in the contexts of criticism that "engage" both with Aboriginal Australia and India, and not just history. If the literary text "'is' in the field of activism, e-laborated in labor" (Spivak 1995: 201), then, to retain an understanding that the space available to the speaking / "telling" narrator "is" marked by a gap that lies between her enunciation, which is distanced but "never" removed from the labor of activism, and that, "elaboration" is also "activism" and "labor," is, I think, a necessity.

Differences are "not" disabling and must also be productively read. Thus I think it is crucial to retain those differences, be it personal, historical, contextual or stylistic, as evidenced in my analysis. It is so because it is by negotiating with one's differences and

it is by working through those that one, i.e. non-Indigenous literary critic, affectively participates with those "who have suffered the sentence of history" (Bhabha 172).

It is in the need to speak from a "common ground" when one is addressing as deep a crisis as a "theft of language" (Roy 6) to critique oppression and, yet, making it absolutely necessary to retain differences that I choose to describe my understanding of Mahasweta and Wright's fiction as one – to use Linda Tuhiwai Smith's term here – that is "democratizing" (Smith 156) from an Indigenous perspective. And it is the "figure," constructed as it is in the literary text, or the figure "as such," that provides us with such an understanding of democratization. Smith classifies "democratizing" as an Indigenous project. According to Smith, "[it] is a process of extending participation outwards through reinstating indigenous principles of collectivity and public debate" (156). Smith's comments in relation to "networking," "rewriting," "envisioning," "story telling," and "intervening" (ff 142), and several others, as "indigenous" projects have concerns that are shared by Mahasweta and Wright.

Spivak suggests Aboriginal India, or tribal land that primarily marks the system of bonded labour, forms the space in Mahasweta's fiction that represents "decolonization *as such*" (78, italics in original). The use of the word "decolonization" in this context has a specific politics that I have discussed earlier. The word denotes a productive use of a misnomer. There is, as I have mentioned in my first chapter, a possibility of indigenizing these decolonizations by locating their "as such" practices and repercussions. Thus, I ask now: what could be the basis of our project in indigenizing "decolonization as such" when we look at literary histories of Aboriginality? I suggest the role of the "figure" (and

images that I have analyzed) in literary texts of Aboriginality, mediated and refracted as it may be, could be productively read in our considerations in this indigenizing enterprise. In doing so, we may, indeed, be able to transform "indentitarian monuments" into "documents of reconstellation" (91). Thus I turn to the "figure" that my thesis enables me to metaphorize without forgetting the "logic of the metaphor" (Spivak 2003: 71).

Since I began my thesis with Puran's story and examined how he is portrayed as a figure of the decolonized future, as he inhabits the "double bind" by not mentioning the pterodactyl in his report, I wish to end with a brief analysis of the figure of the "visionary" that Will Phantom, Normal's errant son, depicts at the end of *Carpentaria*.

The novel that began with a communal vision of aspects of the town of Desperance, refuse to talk about colonialism without mocking white Australia and the Aboriginal community that it depicts, ends with visionary Will Phantom (the son of the protagonist Normal) surveying his cyclone-struck homeland. The town of Desperance, we learn, has been ravaged by a storm, and Will is no longer the "separatist guerrilla" (Devlin-Glass 84) who wants get back at the system. The new Will, as it were, is taken aback by the change after the storm. He is now a figure in the text and not just a character. There is an apocalyptic vision in the novel here; however, from an Aboriginal perspective, the very site of destruction is also the site of possible regeneration that holds a clue for the future. Will, we learn, sees the presence of his ancestral spirits. If we recall the narrative's uncompromised focus on Angel's dumpyard and Normal's fishroom early in the novel, it is possible to suggest that it is in the recognition of these figures "as such" that we may infer a clue for Aboriginal Self-Determination for Wright's "fearless

dreamer". We may infer this from the figures, images, and moments in the literary historical text that we are only gestured toward but require to be read carefully, responsibly.

Will, the visionary, can see more than what the land offers to him. He can see the future in the destroyed present that can be resurrected by his ability to foresee and, most importantly, he can see a possibility for himself and his community. We have in Will's vision a recoding of what we, as readers, are familiar as "devastation". However, for Will, the same "devastation" is "salubrious" (*Carpentaria* 492). There in the ruins of houses and hotels, Will sees "a small castle for the creation of spirits" (491). Will's inward turn is then not a resistance; rather, it is meant to reveal his own possibilities.

> The sight of the devastation was nothing short of salubrious as far as he was concerned. The macabre construction resembled a long-held dream of the water-world below the ground where the ancient spirits of the creation period rested, while the Aboriginal man was supposed to care for the land. [...] Then his view was gone (*Carpentaria* 492).

At the sight of the "devastation," Will is not disturbed; instead, he realizes something that the reader is completely unprepared for at this point in the novel. We learn that Will, the visionary, now saw "history" (491). There is, if we read carefully, a visual flourish in the way Will encounters "history" in the making. And it is narrated with a single sentence which is paused by only two commas. In this sighting of "history," Will, it seems to me, reclaims this palpable, visible, mutating history as an occasion for his own emergence as a figure. He is no longer the subject of history but a precariously located undecidable figure that cannot protect the land he was entrusted with but also witnesses a new history in making.

> He saw history rolled, reshaped, undone and mauled as the great creators of the natural world engineered the bounty of everything man had ever done in his part of the world into something more of their own making (*Carpentaria* 492).

Once a visionary, he can no longer be one with others who do not achieve his vision. The novel, as I have suggested earlier, has a special meaning for materiality in its cultural context. Debris, "waste" and abandoned objects – all tools of the classic Aboriginal *bricoleur* – happen to be in abundance in almost every scene in the novel. The debris, as Devlin-Glass has aptly noted, suggests the absent presence of European settlements (83) that were in and around Desperance. Will finds himself on a floating island in the currents of Gulf of Carpentaria that is made of such debris after he becomes the visionary figure. In a way, in *Carpentaria,* we do not even need to metaphorize this figure of Will, we only need to imagine it to appreciate its potential in indigenizing critiques of decolonization as such.

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